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SUPPORT FOR BLACK STUDENTS AND PARENTS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

By

Deborah D. Davis

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education
In
Educational Leadership for Learning
In the
Bagwell College of Education
Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, GA



Dissertation Signature Page

Name: Deborah D. Davis

Email: ddavis42@students.kennesaw.edu

Degree

Program: Educational Leadership for Learning

The dissertation

titled: Support for Black Students and Parents in Independent Schools

was submitted to the Bagwell College of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Doctor of Education

has been read and approved by the Committee:

Mary M. Chandler
Dissertation Chair Signature

Mary M. Chandler
Print Name

April 14, 2015
Date

Susan L. Banke
Committee Member Signature

Susan L. Banke
Print Name

April 14, 2015
Date

William W. Swan
Committee Member Signature

William W. Swan
Print Name

April 14, 2015
Date

David W. Tilley
Committee Member Signature

David W. Tilley
Print Name

April 14, 2015
Date

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This research is dedicated to all the students I have worked with and will do so in the future. May God continue to grow each of you into the men and women He has created you to be and may the experiences you have at school support that growth.

A quote shared by one of the participants, *"To be culturally effective doesn't mean you are an authority in the values and beliefs of every culture. What it means is that you hold a deep respect for cultural differences..."* Okokon O. Ud

ABSTRACT

SUPPORT OF BLACK STUDENTS AND PARENTS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

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Kennesaw State University, 2015

Independent schools across America have historically served affluent, White students. However, many independent schools now strive to attract more diverse student populations. One subgroup of many independent schools communities is Black students. Black students who enter a traditionally White independent school often find unexpected struggles while acclimating to the independent school environment (Ohikuare, 2013). This study examined the learning experiences that were in place within independent schools to support Black students and their parents. A qualitative investigation was utilized to collect data from 10 independent schools through interviews with eight Cultural Diversity Directors, one Head of School, and one principal to determine the learning experiences schools had in place to support Black students and their parents. The qualitative data were analyzed and sought to answer the following research question and supporting questions: What learning experiences are in place in independent schools in a large, southern metropolitan area to support Black students and their parents? (a) How aware are independent school leaders of specific needs of Black students and parents that may arise as a result of attending a predominately White school? (b) What learning experiences have independent schools put in place specifically to support the needs of Black students and their parents? (c) How do schools assess the learning experiences in place to support Black students and their parents? (d) Which learning experiences do school leaders find to be the most effective when supporting Black students and their parents? (e) How have school administrators facilitated a culture where Black students and parents feel welcomed and valued as part of the school

community? The analysis of data revealed five common themes: academic structures, heightened awareness, community involvement, targeted support, and administrative structures. Specific suggestions for learning experiences were also identified.

Keywords: Black students in independent schools, Black parents within independent schools, support of Black independent school students, cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

During the 2011-2012 school year, approximately 4.5 million students across the United States were enrolled in over 30,000 K-12 independent schools (*Private School Universe Survey*, 2012). Of those students, 71% were White, while 9% self-identified as Black (Brougham & Swaim, 2013). Although many independent schools have traditionally served an elite, White population, many schools now look to serve a more diverse student population (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003). One diverse subgroup within independent schools is students of color, specifically Black students.

Statement of the Problem

Grossberg's (2014) perception was that Black students have to learn how to maneuver through the cultural and economic divisions that can, and often do, exist in independent schools. According to Grossberg (2014), although the trend appears to be that the number of Black students is increasing in independent schools, students reported that they oftentimes feel excluded. Students reported that this exclusion is frequently not a result of intentional exclusion; rather, students often feel excluded "out of indifference to their different economic and cultural backgrounds" (Grossberg, 2014, p. 1). Many Black students in independent schools find they can be socially isolated from their peers (DeCuir-Gunby, Martin, & Cooper, 2011). Students may also experience difficulty maintaining a sense of Black identity in schools that are predominately White. Black students clearly articulated challenges of maintaining their sense of self while navigating many independent school environments (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011).

Serving students in independent schools also means serving their parents. "Culturally competent school counselors and other educators must gain an understanding of the relevant

experience of the Black parents in order to meet their needs at school” (Smith, 2008, p. 19). However, the traditional educator in independent schools is White and may not understand the experience Black students and their parents have in that environment (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). As independent school educators intentionally strive to gain understanding of the experience Black students have in school, they can determine how to best meet academic, social, and emotional needs of Black students in predominately White independent schools. Independent schools should be aware of possible negative consequences for Black students in a predominately White school. When students do not “feel at home,” it is likely that academic achievement will be negatively impacted (Agirdag, Demanet, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2011, p. 466). Arrington et al. (2003) found that academic success for Black students is dependent on their connection to the school community and their emotional health.

The problem that drives the research is that Black students and their parents may not find the needed support within an independent school to navigate the educational setting and school community. Educators in traditionally White independent schools may not be aware of the learning experiences that can be put in place within the school community to better support Black students and their parents. As more Black parents entrust their children’s educational experience to independent schools, leaders within these schools will be better able to provide a positive learning environment when the learning experiences that will effectively support Black students are explored and implemented. Documentaries such as *The Prep School Negro* (2012) and *The American Promise* (2013) illustrate the challenges faced by Black students and parents as they enter independent schools and heightened the awareness of the experience these students and their parents have in independent schools (Ohikuare, 2013). Current research and these two documentaries are resources that educational leaders can use to better understand the experience

Black students have while attending independent schools. The focus of this research is not to explore or define this experience; rather, it is to explore learning experiences that can offer support for Black students and their families navigate independent school communities.

Research Question

The study is designed to explore the learning experiences that are in place in independent schools to support Black students and their parents. It will investigate the following research question:

1. What learning experiences are in place in independent schools in a large, southern metropolitan area to support Black students and their parents?
 - a. How aware are independent school leaders of specific needs of Black students and parents that may arise as a result of attending a predominately White school?
 - b. What learning experiences have independent schools put in place specifically to support the needs of Black students and their parents?
 - c. How do schools assess the learning experiences in place to support Black students and their parents?
 - d. Which learning experiences do school leaders find to be the most effective when supporting Black students and their parents?
 - e. How have school administrators facilitated a culture where Black students and parents feel welcomed and valued as part of the school community?

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this research is to identify specific learning experiences that are in place in independent schools in a southern metropolitan area to support Black students and their parents. The research will heighten the awareness of school leaders in independent schools, who

are traditionally White educators, to learning experiences that can address internal and external struggles Black students often experience. The documentary film, *The Prep School Negro* (2012), was reflective of Lee's experience as a Black student at Germantown Friends School in Philadelphia in 1983. Lee's intention behind the production of the film was to revisit his personal experience as a Black student in an elite, White prep school and highlight the racial naiveté that often exists in independent school communities. The film illustrates many internal and external struggles that Black students experience while attending a school where they are surrounded by students of privilege and knowledge – people they may not have had contact with before. Lee commented on the feeling of guilt associated with having opportunities other Black students did not have. Black students may enter the independent school world from different backgrounds and cultures than do students who fit the typical profile of the traditional independent school student (Ohikware, 2013). The research findings will provide independent school leaders with information that will allow a greater level of support for Black students and their parents within independent school communities.

Local Context

An independent school located in a large southern metropolitan area, at which the researcher is a faculty member, has recognized some of the challenges students may face and desires to provide a higher level of support to all diverse students, including Black students. In response to this desire, the school's Academic Council and Administrative Cabinet established a goal of increasing diversity awareness as a part of the school's action plan. The goal was, "Through learning experiences delivered with systematic intentionality, to further cultivate, among the school community, an increase in sensitivity with regard to diversity" (Academic Council, 2012, p. 60). Under the primary goal, there were also sub-goals that supported the

overarching goal of increasing sensitivity to diversity. Specifically, the school Leadership Teams, along with the Board of Trustees, desired to “develop learning experiences that support appreciation for diversity among all community stakeholders and utilize current systems to monitor and continually refine stakeholder cognizance, understanding, and support of diversity across the school community” (Academic Council, 2012, p. 61). To support the efforts of the action plan, the school formed a Diversity Committee to facilitate the required tasks to support this school improvement initiative. The members defined diversity in the following manner:

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect, understanding that each person is unique, and recognizing our individuality. Differences may include the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities and talents, denominations of Christian faith, political beliefs, or academic abilities and learning styles. The exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment leads to understanding one another and moves us beyond simple tolerance to embracing the rich learning experiences of diversity within our body. (Cultural Diversity Committee, 2013, p. 1).

The committee was charged with the task of facilitating the development of learning experiences that would support an increased sensitivity to diversity within the school community (Academic Council, 2012).

As diversity goals were established, the school’s Leadership Team acknowledged the school’s current population was not representative of the surrounding neighborhood. School leaders recognized, specifically, that the percentage of Black students was an underrepresentation compared to the metropolitan neighborhood in which the school was located. In 2013, 65.5% of the county’s population was White and 26.7% was Black (United States Census Bureau, 2013). However, the current school population consists of 87.1% White students and 5.5% percent Black students. Currently, 13% of the school’s student population is non-white (Academic Council, 2012, p. 42). Therefore, in addition to supporting the current Black and other diverse students, it is also a desire of the school’s Leadership Team, supported

by the Board of Trustees, to increase the number of Black students, as well as other diverse groups, within the school community.

The dilemma the school faces is that there have not been learning experiences in place to intentionally support Black students. The school now seeks guidance on how to more effectively serve the Black students and their parents in the school community. School leaders anticipate that additional support of Black students and their parents will promote a more diverse student population. Black parents have stated to school leaders that they do not want their child to be the only one of their race in the school or in a classroom. Therefore, the school leaders recognize that learning experiences must be in place to support these students so that other Black students and parents will want to be members of the school community. As part of the school's Action Plan, school leaders now face the challenge of determining learning experiences that can be put in place to support diverse learners, specifically Black students and their parents, as well as other racial and ethnic subgroups. As the school seeks to increase cultural sensitivity regarding diversity within the school community, it will be beneficial for the school leaders to examine the practices, programs, policies, and initiatives of other independent schools to determine best practices to support Black students and their parents.

Conceptual Framework

Black students and their parents are the focus of this study because this group represents one of the larger minority groups in the state in which the researcher lives (United States Census Bureau, 2013). This group is also underrepresented in most independent schools in the researcher's state as compared to the general population. Educators are charged with the task of preparing students to enter a diverse workforce; therefore, greater diversity and empathy are required within schools to adequately prepare students to meet successfully the challenges found

in a global economy (Lee, 2011). Students benefit from the opportunity to share with and learn from others who have different views; therefore, diverse school environments provide the opportunity for students to be better prepared for a diverse workplace (Lee, 2011). When independent schools are able to support Black students, a more diverse environment is created, which promotes the ability of all students to understand, appreciate, and work with diverse groups of individuals (Alger, 2013).

Review of Relevant Terms

The following is a list terms and definitions relevant to this study.

Independent School: An independent school is a school that does not receive primary funding from government sources to support the programs and operations of the school. Independent schools are funded by private organizations and/or individuals (*Private School Universe Survey*, 2012).

Learning experiences: For the purposes of this study, learning experiences will include specific procedures, policies, initiatives, and programs.

Cultural Diversity Director: The person at each school who is given the responsibility to oversee and facilitate diversity awareness and support within the school community will be identified as the Cultural Diversity Director (Romney, 2008). Schools often have different titles for this position; however, for consistency within this study, those in this role will be referred to as the Cultural Diversity Director unless specifically identified otherwise.

Black students and their parents: Black students and parents will be defined as students and parents who are non-white and have a Black heritage. Black will encompass those identifying themselves as Black. The researcher choose to use the identifying term Black instead

of African-American because not all Black Americans have a gynecological connection to Africa.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation process began with the determination of a topic. Attracting, supporting, and retaining diverse students in independent schools was the preliminary focus for the researcher. The review of over 85 articles allowed the researcher to narrow the focus to the support of Black students and their parents within independent schools. Chapter Two is an introduction to the problem and an exploration of the impact diversity has had on public education and independent schools in America. The problem identified through the review of the literature is that Black students and their parents may not have the needed support to navigate an independent school community. In Chapter Two, the researcher summarizes research and other publications that focus on the theoretical framework that supports this study, diversity in American education, and Black students within independent schools. Chapter Three describes the methodology the researcher followed as the study was completed. Chapter Four reports the findings from the interviews and any information gathered from the review of school documents or print collateral. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the conclusions gained from the study and of the implications of the findings.

Summary

As the number of Black students attending independent schools increases, the schools will continue to compete for Black students and must be able to demonstrate that the school is capable of meeting the needs of Black students and their parents (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Personal experiences of Black students and research highlight the importance of schools recognizing and acknowledging different needs of Black students within an independent school

community. Many Black students come to independent schools from a different culture than the traditional independent school student (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). According to Ohikuara (2013), Black students and their parents must recognize that admittance into an independent school does not provide assurance for a successful educational experience. Oftentimes, Black students encounter challenges that were not expected. According to a study conducted in 2003, 75% of Black students reported that special efforts were required to fit into their school communities and; 82% reported negative experiences at school (Arrington et al., 2003).

The research explored the learning experiences that are in place in independent schools to support Black students and their parents in a large, southern, metropolitan area. The researcher gained insight as to how to more efficiently meet the needs of Black students and their parents as they navigate the independent school world. The data collected provided insight and guidance for school leaders who work to support Black students and their parents within their school communities.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The educational outcomes for Black students in American schools are not always equivalent to those of White students (Farkas, 2003). The achievement gap between Black and White students has been well documented and still reflects that the average Black student performs below approximately 75% of his or her White peers (Rothstein, 2013). As Black parents seek the best educational setting for their children, many consider independent schools (Freedman, 2004). A switch from a public school to an independent school often results in noteworthy improvement of educational performance for Black students (Chaddock, 2000). However, Black students can encounter a different set of challenges within the walls of, oftentimes, predominately elite, White schools. Students attending predominately White independent schools report they feel isolated from their peers, both at school and in their neighborhoods. As a result of their school choice, they struggle with maintaining their Black identity, and find it difficult to assimilate into a predominately White school environment (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Awareness of such challenges can allow school leaders to provide needed support to students and their parents as challenges arise. The purpose of the review of literature is to describe the theoretical framework that supports the study, to consider the implications diversity has had on American education, to explore the benefits diversity provides within educational settings, to examine diversity within independent schools, to reflect upon the needs of Black students who attend independent schools, to investigate learning experiences that are in place in some independent schools to support Black students and their parents, and review funding for diversity initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy are similar educational theories that support the intent of the study regarding support for Black students in independent schools. Both theories respond to the growing requirement for educators to meet the needs of a more diverse learner population within educational settings. The demographics within the United States are ever changing; therefore, the need to adjust teaching pedagogy to meet the needs of all learners is required (Brown & Cooper, 2011). Social Constructionism is a theory that strives to make sense of the social world (Andrews, 2012). The researcher used these theories as a foundation to provide rationale for the need for support of Black students within independent schools.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is an educational theory that supports the need for effective teachers to facilitate learning in such a way that they are “non-judgmental and inclusive” of student backgrounds (Brown & Cooper, 2011, p. 66). Gay (2002) defined Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as the use of “cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for more effective teaching” (p. 106). Throughout literature, the two terms tend to reference the same philosophy for teaching culturally-diverse students. The theories stress the integration of cultural awareness and appreciation into educational processes and structures to support academic success (Brown & Cooper, 2011). These authors summarized CRP as “knowledge of who children are, how they perceive themselves, and how the world receives them” (p. 79).

Research has found that diverse students will typically underperform as compared to students considered to be mainstream (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Implementing Culturally

Relevant Pedagogy and teaching strategies allows teachers to identify cultural differences that may affect the manner in which a Black student learns (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Theorists associated with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy emphasize that the focus of educators should be on the achievement of students and how the culture from which a student comes impacts academic success (Brown & Cooper, 2011). Teachers, specifically those in independent schools, must recognize and acknowledge that Black students are likely to have a different cultural background than White students (Arrington et al., 2003). This recognition and acknowledgement should inform and drive the instruction in the classroom. Furthermore, school leaders should also recognize cultural differences and allow that knowledge to drive the development of learning experiences to support Black students and their parents.

Social Constructionism

Social Constructionism is an aspect of grounded theory that attempts to make sense of the social world through a focus on social interactions and exchanges (Andrews, 2012). In recent years, the theory has been attached to qualitative research as a way to examine knowledge and its relationship to social contexts and experiences of everyday life. Andrews argued that social constructionists focus on knowledge and how it is created. The researcher examined this theory in relationship to the social experiences of Black students in independent schools. From a social constructionist lens, everyday interactions impact how students obtain knowledge and their educational experience (Andrews, 2012).

Review of Research

Implications of Diversity on American Education

Diversity in American schools is not new, and school leaders in every era have tried to address needs that arise as a result of diverse populations within schools. As early as 1850, it was

reported that over half of New York City residents were immigrants (Riehl, 2009). Montalto stated that in 1935, some New York City schools were holding “‘tolerance assemblies’ to familiarize students with different cultures – Japanese, Puerto Rican, Italian, and Slavic – in order to reduce inter-group tension in the school and improve ethnic students’ self-esteem” (as cited in Riehl, 2009, p. 183). Although diversity has always been a part of American culture and many American schools, diversity issues have not always been addressed in a positive manner. This country is plagued with a history of discrimination and segregation (Rothstein, 2013). The political choices and policies created by adults have had numerous effects on students in American classrooms. American educators have pondered the question of how to meet the needs of diverse learners within the context of a school setting for many years, oftentimes without much success (Reihl, 2009).

Judges at the state and federal levels have attempted to guide and direct schools on how to manage diversity issues within schools. Defining cases such *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Alvarez v. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* (1931), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1955) have all had significant impact on school policies and procedures in meeting the needs of diverse learners. As a result of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), states were directed that they could “constitutionally enact legislation requiring persons of different races to use ‘separate but equal’ segregated facilities” (“*Plessy v. Ferguson*,” p. 1). However, this ruling was overturned in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1955). The Supreme Court directed schools to determine the processes needed to desegregate schools through the Brown cases (United States Courts, 2014). Many recognize *Brown v. Board of Education* to be the landmark court case that began the process of desegregation; however, *Brown* was not the first case for desegregation legislation. Some 20 years prior, in 1931, the *Alvarez v. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon*

Grove School District case directed a local school district that it could not educate Mexican-American and Mexican children in a separate facility from the facility where the American children were taught (Alvarez, 1986). An aside for this citation is that the only official record of the court case that is in existence is reference to the Petition for Writ of Mandate No. 66625, February 13, 1931. After a persistent search in both city and county records, a badly deteriorated microfilm was found with no official court recording number for the final court decision (Alvarez, 1986).

Not only have court cases impacted on how diversity is addressed in schools, but many government policies and legislation have been passed to provide guidance to school districts on how to serve students of diversity. As early as 1853, government funds were used to support an independent school designed to meet the needs of intellectually-challenged students in Pennsylvania (American Educational History, 2014). The funding of the school demonstrated a desire to meet the needs of diverse learners. In the coming years, The Civil Rights Act passed in 1875 and, as a result, banned all segregation in public facilities; however, this was overturned in 1883 when the Supreme Court ruled the Civil Rights Act to be unconstitutional (American Educational History, 2014). Each of these rulings illustrates the government's involvement in addressing the educational needs of diverse students. Diversity within American education can readily be seen when examining the historical perspectives of policy and legislation.

Additional legislation that had an impact on diversity within education in America includes The Immigration Act of 1965 and The Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974. Each piece of legislation had its own impact on the educational processes established in American schools to serve students of diversity. The Immigration Act of 1965 forever changed the make-up of the American population. The Immigration Act of 1965 allowed for additional

family reunification by lifting quotas that had previously controlled entrance of immigrants into the United States. The Act immediately had impact on the population of public schools as more immigrant children entered the country (History.com, 2010). The Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 confirmed that states could not “deny educational opportunities based on race, color, sex, or national origin by engaging in deliberate segregation by an educational agency” (“Equal Educational Opportunities Act,” 2010, p. 1).

Segregation in schools today is higher now than it was 30 years ago. It is interesting to note that 70% of Black students attend schools that are predominately Black (Brosnan, 2001). Although some would argue we have come a long way in the past 200 years, others would argue we still have a long way to go in regards to desegregating American schools. Bonenfant (2013) believed that recognizing the development of intercultural competence can better serve the needs and achievement of diverse student learners. As school leaders assess educational programs and structures, it is important to acknowledge that “multicultural education is the cornerstone in today’s education” (Bonenfant, 2013, p. 5). Educators from various school settings must be aware of the impact diversity and related issues have on students and a school’s culture.

Benefits to a Diverse Educational Setting

Alger (2013) expressed the need for diverse school settings by stating that schools are responsible to provide students with opportunities to develop skills that will allow them to be engaged citizens in worldwide economy that is more and more diverse. He stated that with decisions such as *Gutter v. Bollinger* (2003) and *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2013), the Courts have now expressed, through law, that diversity within educational settings at all levels is of utmost importance. The decisions delivered in both cases stated the clear importance of race in admissions programs and policies at the college level, but the same is true for K-12

schools as well. Through both of these cases, the Court recognized and expressed the importance of a diverse school community and the positive impact it has on students' preparation to enter a diverse, global workforce (Alger, 2013). Although social diversity can cause anxiety among some, diversity also allows for enhanced creativity, more effective decision-making and problem solving, and a variety of perspectives that all lead to greater productivity and innovation (Phillips, 2014). Racial diversity within peer groups, whether at work or at school, allows for greater opportunity for knowledge and expertise to be shared (Plaut, 2014). According to Marsella (2009), "We can no longer think of ourselves as citizens of various nations" (p. 129). We live in a complex, global society where appreciation and respect for diversity benefit the greater good (Marsella, 2009).

The importance of and necessity to support diversity within public schools has been well documented. Many of the same benefits public schools have experienced as a result of diversity, independent schools can and should experience as well. Justice Breyer stated in *Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (2007), that diversity should "help bring about (improvements) such as the eradication of remnants or past segregation, the enhancement of education for all students, and better preparation for democratic government" (Shin, 2009, p. 1177). It is widely accepted that "a diverse educational experience prepares students for the world to come" (Brosnan, 2001, p. 481). Students can be "highly receptive to a skilled approach to the teaching of prejudice reduction and elimination" (Brandwein & Donoghue, 2012, p. 42).

Today, independent schools are more likely to develop programs and structures of support for students who do not fit the traditional profile of an independent school student than in the past. For multiple reasons, schools now focus on increasing the diversity of their school community. Many schools recognize that a "new generation (of) learners who are exposed to

multicultural diversity will be able to develop intercultural competence” (Bonenfant, 2013, p. 5). Furthermore, “The knowledge and skills gained in multiculturalism can set the tone for new millennium learners of having a clear understanding and awareness of ethnic studies, culturally responsive teaching and learning, and global education” (Bonenfant, 2013, p. 5). Educators see the development of these skills as a necessity for students to find success in a global economy. Schools recognize students will be faced with opportunities to learn and work with others who are culturally and ethnically different when they graduate. In order to prepare students to face the world outside the walls of an independent school, many school leaders strive to create an environment where diversity is embraced and welcomed. Historically, this has not been the case in many independent schools in the United States.

Addressing diversity issues is not always easy nor are the benefits always readily seen. Riehl (2009) cited that “some scholars, including Foster, Parker, and Shapiro, suggest that administrators who do become committed to social change will experience conflict as they are expected to maintain institutions which they no longer see as legitimate” (p. 185). The move toward a heightened awareness of diversity within an independent school is not always easy; however, as seen through research and literature, there are many benefits for students and school community members.

Many independent schools recognize the responsibility of educating students who are likely to be future leaders. These students, future leaders, must learn how to work successfully in a multicultural world and comprehend misunderstandings of race that often still exist within American society (Brosnan, 2001). Teachers are encouraged to develop and increase “their own multicultural competence, promote equitable collaboration” between the school and home, and

“advocate for [diverse students] in order to be treated equally in the school setting” (Bonenfant, 2013, p. 2).

Diversity within American Independent Schools

Educators in public schools are often forced to address concerns regarding diversity as a result of government legislation and policy or simply as a response to the school community. However, diversity issues and concerns must be addressed by independent school educators as well in order to promote an effective learning environment. The desire to best serve American students through educational means will continue to drive the creation and development of programs and policies to meet the needs of all learners. Historically, this charge has only been given to public schools in the United States; however, in recent years, independent schools have also accepted the charge to meet the needs of a more diverse student body (Mitchell, 2014).

Many independent schools were established to serve an exclusive, privileged subgroup of the population who left public schools, a phenomenon known by some as “White Flight” (Fairlie & Resch, 2002). Specifically, some were originally designed to exclusively educate White children (Brosnan, 2001). However, this is not the mission or goal of independent schools today (Batiste III & McGovern, 2012). Schools now recognize the benefit and importance of a diverse student population. Although the student population of some independent schools is still reflective of exclusive acceptance patterns, many schools take intentional, systematic steps to attract, support, and retain a diverse student body and faculty (NAIS, n.d.).

The research on diversity within independent schools is somewhat limited unless the search is expanded to the private college and university level. Studies and research have been completed at the college level to understand the impact diversity has on individuals and the school community. Fewer studies have been completed to recognize the implications of

diversity within independent K-12 schools. The African-American Boys Coalition (AABC) is one group that has recognized the need for research to be conducted to better understand challenges and difficulties Black males may have in an independent school environment (Arrington et al., 2003). However, these authors found several levels of resistance when attempting to conduct research regarding the experience of Black students in independent schools. Resistance came from both school administrators and parents. This resistance shed light on the stakeholders' attitudes towards diversity within the communities (Arrington et al., 2003). Much of the literature referenced private college settings versus private K-12 settings. A considerable amount of the knowledge and insight gained from the research completed at the college level can easily be transferred to schools serving K-12 learners (Pitts, 2009). Institutions at both levels compete for students from other independent schools. Students and parents are seeking a school that will meet academic needs, as well as, social and emotional needs (Ohikuare, 2013). Historically, most independent schools at both levels have not attracted Black students and now look for avenues to obtain the attention of Black students and parents.

Many independent schools have long touted academic preparation and character development; however, in recent years, many have also made a commitment to diversity (Brosnan, 2001). Evidence of this commitment is often seen when words like 'diversity' and 'multicultural' are included in a school's mission or vision statement (Brosnan, 2001). Although many independent schools have historically served an exclusive population of affluent White students, most independent schools have begun to question this exclusive nature and to embrace diversity. A greater sense of connection to the community is now seen as a result of embracing diversity by many schools (Brosnan, 2001). Furthermore, "Many independent schools have made

great strides over the past decade in their work to become more diverse and inclusive communities” (Batiste III & McGovern, 2012, p. 70).

The work of addressing diversity issues in American schools has not been an easy task. Independent school educators are wise to recognize the challenges associated with creating a more diverse culture. School leaders who are involved with diversity work should recognize that, according to the Dean of Faculty at The Winsor School in Boston, “progress with diversity is slow and maddening sometimes” (Brosnan, 2001, p. 471). School leaders can benefit from collaborating with other independent school leaders to recognize and determine best practices in terms of supporting a more diverse school community. Unfortunately, educators in independent schools do not always have access to colleagues and a network of professionals from other schools for professional growth as educators in public schools. Proximity to other independent school educators and the competitive nature of the independent school world do not always foster a collaborative attitude. Therefore, it is beneficial for independent school educators to be intentional about connecting with and learning from other professionals from other school settings as they strive to meet the needs of diverse learners.

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) is one organization that provides support for independent schools and has recognized the need to make diversity a priority. As a result, the NAIS established an Office of Diversity and began hosting an annual People of Color Conference in the 1980’s (Brosnan, 2001). As the NAIS strives to lead and guide independent schools in supporting a more diverse school community, the organization compiled a list of “Principles of Good Practice for Equity and Justice” that became the predominant guidelines for school operations. In November of 2012, the board of the NAIS approved and posted the “Principles of Good Practice: Equity and Justice” on the organization’s

website (“Principles of,” 2012). As independent schools have recognized the need to service a broader range of students, many have taken intentional steps to foster the educational experience of all students. Most independent schools “are no longer content to merely serve the wealthy and upper-middle class” (Brosnan, 2001, p. 473).

Romney (2008) found that many independent schools have established a serious commitment to diversity in recent years. One evident act that demonstrates this commitment is the addition of a Cultural Diversity Director, or other position with a similar title in some schools. A Cultural Diversity Director’s role is to assist school members in accepting and supporting diverse others into the community (Romney, 2008). The addition of such a position is a significant step to supporting diversity within an independent school. A change in philosophy of diversity is not always accepted by those in an independent school community; therefore, a sense of priority for diversity must come from the top down (Gasman, Kim, & Nguyen, 2011). School leaders must communicate to the school community that diversity is an important aspect of the school culture and climate. School stakeholders are more likely to embrace a new attitude and mindset if it is first expressed by school leadership. School stakeholders will recognize that diversity is a priority for a school when communication and action are in line with one another in regards to meeting the needs of a more diverse community (Pitts, 2009).

For a school community to embrace diversity, one of the first steps, according to Pitts (2009), former president of the University of Indianapolis, is for the “president to set a tone of honesty about diversity” (p. 16). She also stated that “if there is superficial and almost expected rhetoric from the president, the faculty and staff will just tuck those words away and go about their business” (Pitts, 2009, p. 16). The same tone needs to be set by heads of schools at the K-12

level. Students, faculty, parents, and other stakeholders will know if diversity is a true priority of a school (Pitts, 2009).

One of the main attractions to an independent school for diverse students and parents is to see students who represent diversity. Therefore, attracting diverse students must become a priority for schools when increasing diversity is a goal. Minority students know the true climate and culture of a school community, and they positively impact the future for other minority students (Pitts, 2009). Pitts suggested the same is true for students and parents at the K-12 level. When diverse students have a positive experience in an independent school, it is highly probable they will share their experience with other minority students. Pitts encouraged all staff and faculty to fulfill the responsibility of recruiting and to have a vested interest in diversity to maximize the benefits of diversity within school communities. She further advocated that all school leaders need to intentionally seek out opportunities to make personal contacts and participate in program initiatives in support of minority recruitment.

As independent schools look to increase the diversity within the student population, Pitts (2009) offered several ideas and strategies that have been successful at the college level and are likely to produce similar results at the K-12 level. Pitts (2009) stated that the “most successful opportunities come from an aggressive series of direct programs, often done in conjunction with community partners” (p. 16). Pitts (2009) explained, “Partnering with organizations in the community provides us with visibility in the minority communities and with the opportunity to host minority students on our campus, thus giving them the opportunity to learn about our institution” (p. 17). Connections with community organizations can also be leveraged to support an increase in diversity at the K-12 level. Reaching students “where they are” through community organizations is a beneficial avenue to connect students with a school and programs

and services provided through the school. Through these connections, the school is also able to evaluate the needs of potential applicants.

Schools must learn how to be creative with institutional funds and to develop partnerships with community agencies to provide financial support for those minority students who will need such support to attend the school (Pitts, 2009). Pitts (2009) suggested that “our story is one that demonstrates that private school tuition costs do not have to be a barrier to minority enrollment and that with aggressive and targeted programs and a commitment to get the job done, colleges and universities can recruit and retain a strong minority student body” (p. 18). K-12 institutions that desire to increase the diversity of a student body must adopt the same mindset. School leaders must be willing to find avenues of support for diverse parents when needed, particularly when a school desires to increase the diversity in regards to socio-economic status. Many schools state diversity is a priority and a focus; however, funds are not allocated for financial support of parents who will need assistance in order for their child to attend a high-cost tuition school. Meeting the financial needs of parents is just one of the concerns schools should consider when developing support for students and their parents.

Gray-Little and Hafdahl (2000) stated that schools “with ethnically mixed student bodies might have unintended negative consequences for non-cognitive outcomes such as self-esteem and peer victimization (as cited in Agirdag et al. 2011, p. 466). If a student does not “feel at home” in the context of a school community, he or she may not be able to take full advantages of the educational opportunities afforded to him or her by the school (Agirdag et al., 2011, p. 466). Therefore, leaders must be aware of the culture of the school in order to offset potential adverse consequences and must support school unification efforts (Agirdag et al., 2011). Awareness of possible consequences provides school leaders the opportunity to plan programs and initiatives to

address proactively issues and concerns. Effective leadership in diverse settings requires greater diversity and empathy among key leaders (Lee, 2011).

Along with increasing student diversity, independent schools must also reflect upon the composition of the staff. Most independent schools have a poor track record of hiring teachers of color (Brosnan, 2001). It is estimated that teachers of color make up only 5% of the workforce within independent schools as compared to 18% within public schools (Brosnan, 2001). If school leaders are truly committed to cultivating a diverse school community, it is important that students have the opportunity to learn from teachers of color. Therefore, a significant stride toward cultivating a climate that supports diversity is to increase the number of faculty of color on campus (Gasman et al., 2011). In addition, these authors stated, schools have begun to “recognize the benefits of a diverse faculty” (p. 212). As with potential student applicants, “Potential (employment) candidates of color want to know that there are others like them at the institution” (Gasman et al., 2011, p. 218). These authors also emphasized the significance of White allies in the process of recruiting and retaining of faculty of color. This idea can also be transferred to the need for White allies for students. When faculty and students feel supported by others, they are more likely to have a positive experience. School leaders are wise to recognize the necessity for such support and be open to exploring how that support can best be implemented for students, parents, and faculty.

Bastiste and McGovern (2012) found that often independent schools hire teachers and administrators who have either attended independent schools or have worked in independent schools, causing the vast majority of those hired to be White. It takes intentional efforts on behalf of the school leaders to seek and hire people of color. Turner and Myers suggested that teachers of color are underrepresented in higher education institutions as a result of the lack of

“aggressive hiring strategies” (as cited in Gasman et al., 2011, p. 213). Some faculty of color could be under the impression that elite schools are not interested in them due to an institution’s historical legacy of exclusion. The same notions can be perceived by K-12 educators in independent schools. Elite universities and independent schools must take intentional action to dispel such perceptions (Gasman et al., 2011). An effective strategy for recruiting faculty of color for independent schools is to use the personal networks of current faculty of color (Gasman et al., 2011). Gasman et al. concluded that schools will not attract a diverse student body without a diverse faculty. School leaders are wise to recognize that developing a multicultural school coincides with efforts to hire teachers of color (Brosnan, 2001). Again, it is important that the conversation regarding diversity match the actions of the institution. Schools cannot state that diversity is a focus without backing up the statement with tangible actions that support a more diverse community. Hiring teachers of color is a tangible way to show a school community that there is a focus to foster a more diverse school community.

Needs of Black Students and Parents in Independent Schools

Independent school leaders across the country seek ways in which to best support students who represent minority populations within independent schools (Arrington et al., 2003). For example, groups from three independent schools in New York are creating films that portray the experience of a student of color in their schools. (Grossberg, 2014). The goal is that the films will encourage conversation in regards to the experience students of color have in a traditional, wealthy, White school environment (Grossberg, 2014). Independent schools also seek to find experiences that will provide students the opportunity to increase cultural awareness. Two such endeavors are the People of Color Conference and the Student Diversity Leadership Conference, both sponsored by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) (www.nais.org).

Although there is only limited research on the topic of Black students within independent schools, recently several groups or organizations have begun to share the stories of how Black students attempt to assimilate into predominately White independent school communities. Documentaries such as *The Prep School Negro* (2012) and *The American Promise* (2013) are attempts to illustrate the challenges Black students face in independent schools. Each of these documentaries share the stories of Black students navigating the elite, White school community. The rationale and significance of this study is to examine how independent schools in a southern metropolitan area attempt to address some of the challenges Black students and their parents face when entering an independent school world. Although the challenges are well documented, literature and research on how to support students and their parents through the challenges is limited.

Supporting Black Students and Parents in Independent Schools

As independent school educators seek to address diversity issues and concerns, creating a safe learning environment for all learners is crucial. When school leaders do not address diversity issues within a school, they often “contribute to institutional climates that do not value and respect the diverse points of view of all students” (Warren, Pacino, & Lawrence, 2011, p. 10). Students will feel safe in a learning environment when teachers are able to be “culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and culturally proficient” (Warren et al., 2011, p. 10). “Diverse learners need to be exposed to an affective learning environment that does not only raise their self-esteem and motivate them in the learning process, but also guides them to the path of becoming global citizens” (Bonenfant, 2013, p. 5). One suggestion is for teachers to take part in professional development that focuses on diversity and provides resources for them to be better equipped to meet the needs of diverse students (Warren et al., 2011, p. 10).

School counselors and other educators must demonstrate an understanding regarding the experience of Black students to be able to meet their needs at school (Smith, 2008). Therefore, as schools seek to educate Black students, it is important that schools also focus on the support that will be provided for parents. Schools should also find ways to encourage the Black parents to be involved in school activities and functions (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). McNeil and Davis (2003) stated that “in private schools, Black parents often feel hesitant to get involved in their child’s school because they feel intimidated by economic, educational, and cultural differences” (as cited in Smith, 2008, p. 21).

Unfortunately, many Black students who attend independent schools often “experience social isolation from their peers” (DeCuir-Gunby, et al., 2011, p. 113). As teachers and school leaders work with students, it is important to recognize this fact and try to facilitate opportunities for students to feel connected to peers. School leaders should facilitate activities where students are allowed opportunity to participate in exploration of racial identities, which can include active and open interchanges concerning race (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Furthermore, “Schools should engage in culturally relevant teaching practices” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 129).

Funding for Diversity Initiatives

Parents in the United States have a wide range of options when considering how to educate their children: public school, charter schools, virtual schools, independent schools, and homeschooling. Each of these options is available to parents and is supported, at some level, through government legislation. In *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* 2002, the Supreme Court ruled that parents in Ohio could use state-funded school vouchers to assist in the cost for a school of their choice, either independent or charter (Baily & Cooper, 2009).

Some government programs are designed to assist parents who are interested in independent schools but may not have the financial means to cover tuition costs. Government support for students attending independent schools varies from state to state. Some states offer school choice vouchers, while other states have different policies and programs in place that provide parents with limited financial support. Arizona, Illinois, Iowa, and North Carolina all offer their residents tuition assistance through tax credit programs. School Choice Programs are offered by Colorado, Indiana, Louisiana, and Wisconsin (DiPerra, 2012).

The two state-funded initiatives that provide state money to independent schools in the researcher's state are an Education Expense Tax Credit Program and a Special Needs Scholarship Program. The tax credit program provides individuals and corporations the opportunity to defer a portion their state income taxes to Student Scholarship Organizations (SSO). The SSO's distribute the funds to the schools designated by the contributors. Students are then able to apply for scholarships to attend independent schools. Students must enter as kindergarten students or enroll in an independent school from a public school or a home school setting in order to be rewarded scholarship money from an SSO. Money is granted to students based on need. SSOs allow students, who otherwise would not have the means to do so, the opportunity to attend an independent school.

Independent schools can also participate in Special Needs Scholarship Act. This program allows students who are served through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to receive scholarship money to attend one of the 190 participating independent schools in the state. Currently, 2,529 students participate in this program across the state. Students who meet the criteria of this program receive anywhere from \$2,539 to \$15,874, depending on the level of need. The average scholarship awarded for the 2011-2012 school year was \$6,860. Both

students and schools must meet state criteria in order to participate. The school must document student progress and report the data to the state (Georgia Department of Education, 2014).

Summary and Implications of Literature Review

Although independent schools in America have historically educated the upper-class, White student, many schools now desire to serve a broader population (Batiste III & McGovern, 2012). Providing an educational experience for students of color, students of lower socioeconomic status, and students with learning differences is often an aspiration of many independent school leaders (www.nais.org). The value that a diverse student body adds to the school community is seen as an asset for all students. Schools must prepare students to enter a culturally diverse world where a global economy is now the focus for many businesses (Phillips, 2014). Students need to leave high school prepared to enter either the work force or a university setting, where working with others from different backgrounds is required (Alger, 2013). Success in today's world is often dependent upon one's ability to build relationships and collaborate with others. Understanding human differences and appreciating the value each person brings to a particular setting is a necessity in a global society (Marsella, 2009).

Independent schools have become intentional with efforts to attract, support, and retain students of diversity. It is not enough for a school to state that there is a focus on diversity. There must be intentional plans and initiatives put in place in order for diversity to increase on an independent school campus (Pitts, 2009). As schools look to increase the diversity of the school's population, the "new generation of learners must gain adequate knowledge in multicultural education and diversity in order to be effectively equipped and prepared to face the challenges in global education" and beyond (Bonenfant, 2013, p. 5).

Literature reflective of support provided to Black students who attend independent K-12 schools is scarce. Literature and research is most often reflective of the personal experiences Black students have in independent schools, either at the K-12 level or college level. Literature can be found detailing the support that is offered by colleges and universities. Documentary media, whether it be films, videos, or articles can be found; however, the span of scholarly literature that focuses on support for Black students in the independent school world is narrow. The intent of the researcher is to heighten awareness of independent school educators to the need for support of Black students within their communities and to the learning experiences that are in place in some independent schools to meet the needs of Black students through a review of the literature that focuses on the topic of Black students navigating the world of an independent school.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Designed as an exploratory dissertation, the study drew from Social Constructionism and Cultural Responsive Teaching/Cultural Relevant Pedagogy theories to examine the learning experiences within independent schools that are in place to support Black students and their parents. The researcher used an interpretivist theoretical framework to thoroughly examine the researched perspective. Accurate and thorough documentation of the perspective provided the researcher the opportunity to tell “an ongoing story” (Butin, 2010, p. 60). The researcher used this perspective to examine and describe the learning experiences of Black students and their parents in independent schools. In the case of this study, the researcher desired to understand the support given to Black students and their parents who attend independent schools in a large southern metropolitan area. A qualitative approach was taken to identify the learning experiences within independent schools to support Black students and their parents.

Research Question

The study was designed to explore the learning experiences that were in place in independent schools in the 2014-2015 school year to support Black students and their parents and to investigate the following research question. Sub-questions were also considered in order to explore adequately the stated research question.

1. What learning experiences are in place in independent schools in a large, southern metropolitan area to support Black students and their parents?
 - a. How aware are independent school leaders of specific needs of Black students and parents that may arise as a result of attending a predominately White school?

- b. What learning experiences have independent schools put in place to specifically support the needs of Black students and their parents?
- c. How do schools assess the learning experiences in place to support Black students and their parents?
- d. Which learning experiences do school leaders find to be the most effective when supporting Black students and their parents?
- e. How have school administrators facilitated a culture where Black students and their parents feel welcomed and valued as a part of the school community?

Research Design

An exploratory research design was used to determine the learning experiences that are in place in K-12 independent schools to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of Black students within the school communities. The exploratory design allowed the researcher to examine the learning experiences in place in independent schools specifically implemented to support Black students, a topic rarely presented within research literature. An exploratory design is often the most effective approach to research when a topic has not been examined in a particular manner or the topic has not been researched previously (Butin, 2010). As the researcher completed the literature review for this study, little to no research was found regarding the support offered to Black students and their parents within independent schools. The desire of the researcher was, through the exploration of this topic, to provide independent school educators with effective practices that can provide additional support for Black students and their parents.

A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gain insight into the experiences Black students and their parents are provided within independent schools. Qualitative research is

designed to provide insight to the researcher regarding an experience people have in a particular setting (Merriam, 2009). The researcher chose a qualitative approach to explore the interest in understanding the cultural context prevailing for Black students and their parents who choose to become a part of an independent school community. Understanding a phenomenon within social context is the goal of a qualitative study and thus the reason the researcher chose this design (Merriam, 2009).

Individual interviews were conducted with eight Cultural Diversity Directors, or staff fulfilling this type role, one Head of School, and one principal from multiple independent schools in a large southern metropolitan area. Interviews are a primary source of data for qualitative research studies (Merriam, 2009). The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with the participants as a means to elicit information regarding support provided for Black students and their parents. The researcher prepared for the semi-structured interviews by creating ten questions that guided the interview to gain as much information as possible regarding structures in place to support Black students and their parents within each of the participant's school. The semi-structured interview format was selected by the researcher since the interviews were primarily comprised of open-ended questions and the goal of the researcher was to allow the participants to describe the school's support for Black students and their parents in his or her own way (Merriam, 2009). Although the researcher had a list of questions to use during each interview, the interviewer had the flexibility to respond to the participants' comments in order to gain greater knowledge of each school's programs, initiatives, and structures.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures of the university the researcher attends were followed to protect all participants. Approval from the university's IRB and the researcher's dissertation committee was obtained prior to initiation of the study. Only adults

were asked to participate and all data collected was kept confidential. All participants volunteered to participate in an interview and each could have chosen not to participate in the study.

Setting

The interviews for the study took place in one of two settings: at the school of the person who was being interviewed or via telephone. Interviews took place in private offices where confidentiality was protected and interruptions were minimized. Interviews with six participants were face-to-face. Four interviews were conducted by telephone due to inclement weather or time restraints.

Sample of Population

Invitations to participate in interviews were sent to 30 independent school representatives who were members of an area independent school association and were within a 100 mile radius of the researcher's school. Cultural Diversity Directors or other school leaders were contacted via email to voluntarily participate in interviews. At that time, those who received the email invitation had the opportunity not to participate. The person could either choose to not respond to the invitation or decline the invitation. Several of those who received the email invitation did not respond and one person choose to directly decline the invitation to participate. All schools served a Pre-K–12 population except for one school. The researcher sent the email invitation to the group four different times over a three week period. Responses to the invitation were spread out over the three weeks. There were 12 responses to the emails. The researcher was not able to schedule interviews with two school representatives because of scheduling conflicts between the researcher and the potential participants. Participants were selected upon a first response basis.

As soon as a potential participant responded with interest in participating, the researcher scheduled an interview as soon as possible.

Access to Site

Interviews took place in different locations; therefore, access to the site was granted for each site when the participant gave permission for the interview to take place. Participants responded by email and the researcher and the participant agreed upon a time and a place to meet. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the participant's office at their school. Phone interviews were conducted with both the researcher and the participant located in a private office.

Value of Specific Methodology

Personal interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to ask clarifying questions when needed. Open-ended questions provided a structure for the participant and the interviewer to engage in a conversation focused on the questions to be explored through the research (Merriam, 2009). The researcher chose interviews as the method for data collection to obtain specific data from each school as the most effective way to explore the experiences in place in the schools to support Black students and their parents. The ability to ask follow-up questions that were specific to the structure and experience at particular schools was of interest to the researcher. The time spent in conversation with each participant provided the interviewer the opportunity to gather as much data as possible for each of the 10 questions asked. The predetermined questions provided a consistent structure for each interview. Although the list of questions guided each interview, the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to explore new ideas and thoughts presented by each participant (Merriam, 2009).

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a list of 10 open-ended questions to use during each interview. After development of the questions, the researcher asked the peer evaluation team to review the questions to provide needed peer review. The peer evaluation team made suggestions to improve the questions to provide a higher level of clarity. Interview questions are outlined below.

Interview Questions:

1. Explain the tasks assigned to you in your position of leadership at your school in relation to diversity.
2. If there are disparities in educational attainment between White and Black students at your school, how is this disparity addressed?
3. Do you see that Black students have social concerns that are unique to their experience?
4. How do you define the needs of Black students at your school? Do you see that they have different needs than other students?
5. How would you like for the support of Black students and their parents to be different?
6. Describe the learning experiences in place to support Black students and their parents within your school and how the experiences are assessed.
7. Which programs, initiatives, or policies do you find to be most effective with Black students and their parents?
8. Does your school provide specific opportunities for Black parents to be involved in the school community?
9. Does your school desire to increase enrollment of Black students? If so, what does your school do to attract Black families?
10. What additional information would you like to share with me in regards to supporting

the Black students and parents within your school community?

The questions were created to align with the theory of Cultural Responsive Teaching, the current literature, and the research questions. The researcher sought to understand how each school response to the needs of the Black students and parents within his or her school. The basic premise behind Cultural Responsive Teaching is to acknowledge the cultural differences that are present within a school community and address those differences through programmatic and intentional means (Brown & Cooper, 2011). In addition, the researcher also used the review of current literature to help develop the interview questions. Specifically, throughout the literature the experiences of Black students and their parents have been illustrated through pervious research and documentaries. The researcher sought to confirm these experiences within the schools that were represented in this study. The interview questions were also intended to provide answers to the overall research question. The correlation between the research questions, the literature, and the interview questions was identified. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Research and Interview Questions Correlation

Research Question	Literature Correlation	Interview Questions
1: What learning experiences are in place in independent schools in a large, southern metropolitan area to support Black students and their parents?	(Arrington et al., 2003), (Brosnan, 2001), (Freedman, 2004), (Ohikware, 2013)	2, 6, 8, 10
a: How aware are independent school leaders of specific needs of Black students and their parents that may arise as a result of attending a predominately White school?	(Brougham & Bureau, 2013), (Chaddock, 2000), (Freedman, 2004), (Gay, 2002), (Lee, 2011)	2, 3, 4, 10
b: What learning experiences have independent schools put in place specifically to support the	(DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011), (Gasman et al., 2011), (Grossberg, 2014)	6, 8, 9, 10

needs of Black students and their parents?

c: How do schools assess the learning experiences in place to support Black students and their parents? (Plaut, 2014), (Smith, 2008), (Warren et al., 2011) 5, 6, 7, 10

d: Which learning experiences do school leaders find to be the most effective when supporting Black students and their parents? (Plaut, 2014), (Riehl, 2009), (Romney, 2008) 7, 10

e: How have school administrators facilitated a culture where Black students and parents feel welcomed and valued as part of the school community (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011), (Riehl, 2009), (Romney, 2008) 2, 8, 10

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected via one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with eight Cultural Diversity Directors, one Head of School, and one principal from independent schools in a large southern metropolitan area. The desire of the researcher was to conduct a minimum of 10 interviews. The intent was to conduct the interviews in a face-to-face setting. Six interviews were face-to-face. Four interviews were conducted via telephone because of inclement weather or scheduling conflicts.

During each interview, the researcher used the list of 10 pre-determined questions to guide the interview. The researcher took notes during each interview which allowed the researcher to identify key points. The semi-structured interview provided the researcher the flexibility to ask additional questions based upon the participants' responses. The goal of each interview was to discover as much as possible about the learning experiences in place to support the Black students and their parents within each of the schools represented. The researcher

developed questions in anticipation of each interview lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Each participant was asked to set aside an hour for the interview. Interviews lasted from 25 minutes to 2 hours.

Each interview was recorded using a recording application, Recorder Pro, on an I-Pad or I-Phone and a Windows 8 recording application, Sound Recorder on the researcher's computer. The recordings were stored on devices that were password secured. Two recordings were made to ensure that the data was available for transcription. The recordings will be erased six months after the completion of the researcher's degree.

In addition to interviews, the researcher reviewed documents, both in print and electronic form to gather additional data about each school. The researcher examined print collateral e.g. admission view books, school magazines, admissions packets, and websites to further determine support that is provided for Black students and their parents through these publications. The print collateral from each school provided the researcher with demographic data that indicated the racial profile of the school community and with evidence that supported the work, mission, or vision of each school regarding diversity. The researcher was also able to identify representation of Black students through the print collateral which often demonstrates a school's awareness and acknowledgement of the Black students within the school's community. The print collateral was evidence and support for the commentaries made by the participants.

Data Analysis Procedures

After each interview, a verbatim transcription was created from each audio recording. The researcher used the NVivo software, a qualitative research management tool, to analyze each transcription, to assign codes to pieces of data, and to identify common themes from the coding

process. Qualitative researchers assign codes to data to identify common themes from the collected data (O'Neill, 2013). The analysis process allowed the researcher the opportunity to review the data by listening and re-listening to the recorded interviews, reading and re-reading the transcriptions, and reviewing the reports generated through NVivo to isolate the comments that were related to the common themes. The completion of each of these tasks provided the researcher the ability to reflect upon and analyze the data collected via the interviews.

Trustworthiness of Interpretation

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, reliability and validity of the study must be established (Merriam, 2009). Reliability, the assurance that the study can be replicated or repeated, was established throughout the study as the researcher ensured consistency, utilized a peer evaluation team, provided a researcher's positionality statement, and created an audit trail. A list of predetermined questions allowed the researcher to ensure a consistent interview experience for all participants. The peer evaluation team was utilized prior to the start of the study and upon completion of the study. The researcher's integrity and ethical stance was held accountable through the meetings with the team. The ethics of a qualitative researcher speak to both the validity and reliability of a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). Reliability of the study was also supported by the positionality of the researcher. This statement provided the researcher the opportunity to explain "biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research" (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). An audit trail, a detailed account of the study, (see Appendix) was also used by the researcher to establish reliability. The researcher also kept a weekly journal and shared the contents with the peer evaluation team. Each of these practices within a qualitative research study can be used to ensure consistency which allows reliability and validity to be established (Merriam, 2009).

Validity is the assurance that the data collected matched current reality (Merriam 2009). Member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, and the researcher's positionality were used to assure the validity of the study. Member check was used with two participants when the researcher solicited feedback from the participants regarding the emerging common themes that were provided during the interviews. The researcher went back to the two participants to share the data that had been collected and asked if the data collected matched their experiences. Both participants agreed that the data that was collected was congruent with their experiences while working with Black students and their parents at their respective schools.

The researcher had planned to conduct 10 interviews during the study. It began evident after the eighth interview that the findings from each participant were "feeling saturated" and according to Merriam (2009) that is one strategy for establishing validity of a study (p. 219). As the number of interviews progressed, the responses from the participants were more and more similar. In a journal entry, the researcher reflected that it appears that 10 interviews will be adequate to collect data to report the learning experiences that schools have in place to support Black students and their parents.

Limitations of the Study

As the researcher designed the research study, certain limitations were recognized. 1. Only schools in one metropolitan area participated. It cannot be assumed that these schools are representative of all independent schools in the state or across the country. 2. The professional and personal position of the researcher was also a limitation. The researcher was, at the time of the study, the Director of Counseling Services at an independent school within the metropolitan area and had three children who attended the school. The researcher had also been actively involved as a member of the school's Cultural Diversity Committee for five years preceding the

study. 3. Participants were not randomly asked to participate. Invitations to participate in the research were sent to schools who had representation within a group of Cultural Diversity Directors within an independent school association in the southern metropolitan area. 4. Black students and parents who attend independent schools in the metropolitan were not asked to identify the challenges faced as a result of their school choice. The needs of Black students were identified through acknowledging challenges seen through personal experience of the researcher and the review of literature.

Positionality of Researcher

As the researcher of this study, it is important to note the motivation that drives the desire to discover the learning experiences within independent schools to support Black students and their parents. The researcher was a mother and an educator. As a mother with students in an independent school, the desire of the researcher was for her children to attend school that would prepare them to interact and work with people from a variety of backgrounds. Diversity was important to the researcher, and she desired for her children to value and appreciate different groups of people. In addition, the researcher is the high school counselor at the independent school which her children attend. As the researcher works with Black students and their parents, she often sees needs that are unique and different to the needs of the White students. The researcher understands that, in order to have a school community where diversity exists, schools must create a climate where students and parents of diverse groups feel accepted, valued, and welcomed. Thus, the researcher's desire is to discover what learning experiences have been put in place to support Black students and their parents within independent schools.

A bias of the researcher was that the researcher does believe that the experiences of Black students within independent schools is different from their White counterparts. Not all

independent school educators would agree. Therefore, it is important that this bias or believe be stated. The researcher has worked with students and parents who have shared experiences that would support such a belief.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participants were asked to sign a Consent to Participate form prior to the interviews. The Consent to Participate explained participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw their participation at any time without penalty. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study. Participants were provided with information regarding confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a code that was used by the researcher for record-keeping purposes. Names of participants and schools were not disclosed.

The researcher was the only person who had access to the recordings and the only person who listened to the recordings. All interviews were recorded on an Apple iPad and a computer that required a password for access. Participants were informed that all recordings would be destroyed six months after the completion of the study.

All data collected during the study was stored at the researcher's home in a locked cabinet and was destroyed six months after the completion of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to identify the learning experiences in place within independent schools to support Black students and their parents. Data collected during 10 semi-structured interviews with eight Cultural Diversity Directors, one Head of School, and one principal provided insight to the support for Black students and their parents that is offered at the 10 independent schools. Data from the interviews was analyzed through the NVivo software, and common themes were identified. Print collateral from each school were also examined to identify visual and written expressions of support for Black students. The identified themes and data from the examination of print collateral will be the focus of this chapter

Data Descriptions

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Cultural Diversity Directors, one Head of School, and one principal from 10 independent schools over a three-week period. The researcher took notes during each interview. In addition, all interview sessions were recorded using the Recorder Pro application through an iPhone and an iPad. Sound Recorder an application of Windows 8 was also used to provide a backup recording of each interview.

Print collateral e.g. school websites, development magazines, admission view books, and other print or electronic material created by the schools were also examined to identify evidence of visual and written support given to Black students and parents through school-related materials including. The analysis of these documents allowed the researcher the opportunity to see if the data collected through the interviews was supported through official communications and actions from the school.

Data Analysis

After each interview, a verbatim transcription was created from the recordings. The researcher used the NVivo software, a qualitative research management tool, to analyze each transcription, to assign codes to pieces of data, and to identify common themes from the coding process. Analysis of data collected from interviews is the process of assigning codes to pieces of data and identifying common themes (O'Neill, 2013). The analysis process allowed the researcher the opportunity to review the data by listening and re-listening to the recorded interviews, reading and re-reading the transcriptions, and reviewing the reports generated through NVivo to isolate the comments that were related to the common themes. The completion of each of these tasks provided the researcher the ability to reflect upon and analyze the data collected via the interviews.

The NVivo software provided an effective format for transcription and analysis. Audio recordings of the interviews were uploaded to NVivo. Verbatim transcriptions were created and then analyzed to identify common themes. Comments made by participants that related to support of Black students and their parents were isolated from the transcriptions and added to the nodes created in NVivo. Data was categorized into 28 codes or “nodes” in NVivo which were filtered into the five common themes. Creswell (2009) stated that the coding process creates the structure for a researcher to categorize words or phrases and to assign a name to the categories. During the first level of analysis, codes were assigned to data. The next level of analysis allowed the researcher to categorize the codes into themes. The comments from participants consisting of single words or phrases are referred to as references in NVivo. Nodes were the files used in the coding process within the NVivo software where the references are categorized and stored. Upon further analysis, the researcher categorized the 28 nodes into the five themes. A report, Coding

Summary by Node generated through NVivo, allowed the researcher to re-read all references that had been isolated from the transcriptions. Through this process, the researcher was able to re-categorize some of the data statements and verify that other data were categorized appropriately in nodes.

Identified Themes

From reviewing interview notes, listening to interview recordings, analyzing the transcriptions, categorizing comments into nodes, and examining reports generated by NVivo support for Black students and their parents was identified and categorized into the five common themes listed below.

Theme #1: Targeted Support

Theme #2: Academic Structures

Theme #3: Heightened Awareness

Theme #4: Administrative Structures

Theme #5: Community Involvement

The analysis of data extracted 390 references from the 10 transcriptions as words or phrases that identified or illustrated learning experiences that provide support for Black students or their parents. References that referred to specific needs of Black students, which are met through the learning experiences that are categorized in a theme, are also categorized in that theme. The learning experiences identified could be a direct or indirect learning experience for students. Learning experiences for teachers or other stakeholders of the school community were also identified as sources of support for this group of students. Each theme was created when nodes with similar characteristics were grouped together. The researcher was able to recognize

the most frequently referenced topics by comparing the number of references in each theme to the total number of references extracted from the transcriptions. The percentage of references assigned to each theme is identified in the discussion below. A complete description of the number of references and percentages for all themes and nodes was created. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Final Node Analysis

Themes and Nodes	# of Sources	# of References	% of Theme	% of Total
N=390				
THEME #1 Targeted Support		143		36.7%
Cultural Diversity				
Director	8	25	17.5%	6.4%
Liaison for community	4	7	4.9%	1.8%
Faculty	2	2	1.4%	0.5%
Parents	9	36	25.2%	9.2%
Relationship				
Development	3	4	2.8%	1.0%
Students	9	30	21.0%	7.7%
Social Concerns	8	33	23.1%	8.5%
Other responsibilities	4	6	4.2%	1.5%
THEME #2 Academic Structures		80		20.5%
Academic Support	5	14	17.5%	3.6%
Achievement Gap	5	11	13.8%	2.8%
Professional				
Development	5	21	26.3%	5.4%
Workshops	2	6	7.5%	1.5%
Curriculum	8	24	30.0%	6.2%
Data Collection	3	4	5.0%	1.0%

Table 2 Continued

Final Node Analysis

Themes and Nodes	# of Sources	# of References	% of Theme	% of Total
N=390				
THEME #3 Heightened Awareness		77		
19.7% Allowing voices				
to be heard	4	12	15.6%	3.1%
Awareness	7	38	49.4%	9.7%
Parents	4	5	6.5%	1.3%
Students	5	22	28.6%	5.6%
THEME #4 Administrative Structures		66		16.9%
School Structure	5	22	33.3%	5.6%
Faculty representation	5	12	18.2%	3.1%
Mission	3	8	12.1%	2.1%
Financial Support	2	3	2.1%	0.8%
Budget	3	7	4.9%	1.8%
School Racial				
Composition	8	14	21.2%	3.6%
THEME #5 Community Involvement		24		6.2%
Community support				
for diversity	6	15	62.5%	3.8%
Celebration Events	3	4	16.7%	1.0%
Conferences	3	5	20.8%	1.3%

Theme #1: Targeted Support

Of the 390 references identified by the researcher through the analysis of the transcriptions, 143 (36.7%) of the references were related to the tasks or responsibilities fulfilled by the Cultural Diversity Directors. The data revealed learning experiences that Cultural Diversity Directors either designed, facilitated, created, or planned to support Black students and

their parents. The following nodes led to the identification of support provided by the Cultural Diversity Directors as Targeted Support as a common theme: general comments related to tasks and responsibilities directly related to supporting Black students and parents, comments related to liaison work for Black students and parents, comments related to relationship development with Black students and parents, and comments related to social concerns of Black students.

Individuals were asked to reflect upon the support provided for Black students and their parents through a series of questions during the interviews. Upon reflection of the questions, the Cultural Diversity Directors discussed the responsibilities and tasks assigned to them that support Black students and parents. They also discussed learning experiences that they are directly connected to in their schools.

A statement expressed by four of the directors is that the Director of Cultural Diversity should be a full-time position. Six of those who were interviewed were teachers or administrators who had the role of Cultural Diversity Director in addition to their primary responsibilities. Only two of the individuals interviewed are considered full-time Cultural Diversity Directors. All those interviewed commented on the amount of time and energy it takes to provide adequate support for Black students and their parents. One director stated that there were days when it was difficult to find the emotional energy to do “the work.” She continued to discuss that diversity work is a hard and slow process. School leaders who are involved with diversity work should recognize that, according to the Dean of Faculty at The Winsor School in Boston, “progress with diversity is slow and maddening sometimes” (Brosnan, 2001, p. 471). The directors described themselves to be a change agent, a source of accountability for the school, a “person who brings the hose to a fire,” and a resource office for the community.

Relationships were a key aspect of every interview. One director discussed the importance of building relationships with Black students and parents in order to be able to help them not “look at us as the ivory towers.” Many Black parents do perceive independent schools as an unattainable possibility (Ohikware, 2013). The director further stated that someone “has to demystify the prices” and experience for parents. Many directors referred to themselves as a liaison for students, parents, teachers, and other members of their school community. They spoke of times when members of the school community would be insensitive to a Black student, and the director would walk alongside the student for support and would provide guidance for the other members of the community.

Support for parents was also noted as a primary responsibility of the Cultural Diversity Directors. Specifically, 36 references were made during the interviews about the support that is provided for parents. The directors spoke of different learning experiences that are in place specifically to support Black parents. Schools host dinners and forums for Black parents to provide an opportunity for parents to engage in conversation with school leaders. One director spoke directly to guiding and directing Black parents as they help their children transition into a predominately white school setting. He articulated that some parents “still have leftover feelings” from their past experiences. He described open conversations with parents where he has encouraged parents not to make the assumption that their child’s experience will be the same as their school experience. Many Black students are first-generation, independent school students. They and their parents are not familiar with the culture and expectations of this type of environment. One director recognized that these students and parents will have different questions and need different guidance than those with a generational legacy in independent

schools. (Ohikware, 2013) One school has a Black parent affinity group that welcomes new Black families to the community at the beginning of each school year.

Advocating for Black students was a responsibility that was mentioned during each interview. Each individual described ways in which they and others are able to advocate for Black students within their school communities. Directors mentioned the importance of white allies seven times during the interviews. One director stated that one of her most valuable assets within her program was the teachers and administrators that she and students see as white allies. Allies are commonly seen as members of a dominant group who work to relinquish prejudice through support of a non-dominant group within social settings (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Affinity groups are another structure directors use to advocate for students and to provide a “safe place for students to have certain conversations.” One school developed a mentoring group specifically devoted to advocating for and supporting Black students based upon a school survey that identified social needs. The mentoring group was designed to empower students to consider participation in school leadership opportunities.

As individuals considered the needs of Black students in their schools, social issues were a primary concern. Racial and financial divides can cause social concerns for Black students in independent schools (Grossberg, 2014). When asked if the participants saw that Black students had social concerns that were unique to their experience at their school, all but one participant responded that Black students do have social concerns that are unique to their experience. The principal stated that she did not think there were social concerns for Black students in her lower school. All other participants were firm with their responses that they see social concerns regarding the experiences of the Black students at their schools. Dating, prom, dances, spend the nights, participation in sports, assumptions, political ideals, and micro-aggressions were all

subjects brought up by those interviewed. Interracial dating was a topic discussed in interviews. Two directors specifically addressed the concern that Black girls are often the ones who are not able to find a date for prom or other dances. Black boys tend to ask White girls, but White boys do not often ask Black girls. A common comment was made by participants that students often state that they do not like the fact that people assume that because they are Black, they are good athletes. Students do not want others to make assumptions based on stereotypes. Micro-aggressions was term new to the researcher. This term refers to either intentional or unintentional offenses that communicate a hostile or insulting racial tone towards a person or a group of people (Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Romero Diaz, 2012). One director expressed the thought that “healthy adolescent experiences are directly related to relationships” and further expressed her desire to work with Black students to help them have positive peer relationships.

An area of social concern one director mentioned was the area of alumni relations. She expressed her concern that because many Black students do not feel connected to the school community while attending independent schools they do not participate in activities with the classmates after graduation. In the independent school world, this can be seen as a loss of revenue. She has worked to cultivate relationships with alums with the hopes that they will want to return to campus to be a part of the extended school community, not just to contribute financially but also to contribute socially. There are many opportunities for alum to return to campus to mentor students as well, and she wanted more Black students to participate in those types of activities. This director did exactly what is suggested Black students need to feel a part of the school community. They need someone continually to affirm them and reach out to them (Arrington et al., 2003).

Theme #2: Academic Structures

Of the 390 references extracted from the transcriptions, 80 (20.5%) of them referred to academic structures as avenues for support of Black students and their parents. Also identified through the references are concerns or struggles Black students may have from an academic perspective. These comments were included with this theme to identify the needs that specific learning experiences can support. Those interviewed discussed academic support strategies, achievement gaps, data collection processes, curriculum development and implementation, and professional development experiences. Each area can provide both direct and indirect support for Black students and their parents.

The following paragraphs highlight references categorized in the theme academic structures. Participants described Summer Bridge Programs that provide academic and social experiences that better prepare students to enter independent schools. Those interviewed recognized differences in academic preparation and the need for resources such as tutoring for some Black students. One school had developed a mentoring program to assist Black students who had academic concerns. Comments were made that some students who feel pressured to perform athletically can become distracted from academics. Students were described as having difficulty adjusting to a new level of rigor and keeping up with homework. Participants also spoke to the idea that parents do not always understand the level of academic rigor or level of preparation needed for classes. Ohikuare (2013) stated that the transition into an independent school can be difficult for Black students and their parents as well. For these reasons, Black students can lack additional support from home, and this can impact academic performance. Schools have created academic support programs to assist students with the balance of extra-curricular activities and academics. Academic structures such as mentoring and tutoring programs have been put in place, in some schools, to assist Black students and parents as they

navigate the academic challenges of an independent school. Simple acceptance into an independent school does not guarantee a successful experience (Ohikuare, 2013). Parents and school leaders need to recognize that support may be needed to ensure success.

Two directors discussed intentional scheduling practices that cluster Black students into classes. This practice allows a variety of perspectives to be present in the classroom and allows student experiences to be less isolated. It is an attempt to keep from having “only one” Black student in a class. Class discussions are more comfortable for students if they are not the sole representative for their experience or culture (Arrington et al., 2003). Intentional practices like this one can make a difference for students in predominately White classrooms by providing valuable connections for Black students and promoting academic success.

Independent schools are not required to collect and analyze data like public schools. This research revealed nine independent schools were not collecting data to determine the effectiveness of learning experiences or tracking academic progress of students. However, five individuals said their schools are in the process of developing methods to track academic progress, specifically of Black students, to determine if there is an achievement gap present between these students and other student groups in their schools. One director stated that visually it would appear that there is a gap; however, her school is not yet collecting data to verify that perception. One director stated that his school does track academic progress of Black students and is also tracking behavioral issues. The one school that did collect data to track academic achievement used grades, standardized test scores, and college acceptances as tracking standards.

One director stated, “I wish I had better statistics for you” now. He shared that five years ago, a study was conducted at his school and revealed that there was an achievement gap between African Americans and their White and Asian American counterparts. As a result, a

mentoring program was developed to support African-American students. Another director noted that the bigger gap is primarily in the economic area. The lower school principal stated that there was not a gap in the lower school; however, she did see a gap when students entered the school in higher grades. She thought that this was the case not because of race but because of educational experiences.

Beyond tracking academic progress, curriculum is an academic structure that can provide support for Black students while in the classroom. Curriculum provides an identity within the class for students, and one director stated that her school was intentional about curriculum selection. Even the focus on particular authors or posters in the room can cause a student to feel more welcomed in a classroom. Brosnan (2001) referred to the importance of students seeing themselves in their studies. The Cultural Diversity Director of the middle school stated that within the social studies department students are required to take three courses related to justice and equity. The comment was made by one participant that the most support for Black students comes from the classroom environment and the curriculum that is taught. One Cultural Diversity Director stated that she was the person teachers come to when they had pedagogical questions about curriculum related to race or other cultural concerns. She stated that units of study were created to bring awareness into the classroom. Her belief is that diversity needs to be integrated into every area of the curriculum. English and history are the two areas where she is most involved. One director stated that students want to engage in conversations about race, and teachers need to be prepared to facilitate the conversations. One director was encouraged by the Head of School to “bring the hallway conversations into the classroom.” Three of the participants stated that counselors also integrate diversity into classroom guidance lessons which provides support for Black students.

One director stated that professional development for teachers, administrators, and board members as the most effective tool for support of Black students and their parents. One school participated in a year-long professional development experience focused on education of African-American males after the school determined through their GAP analysis that there was concern about the academic achievement of this subgroup of their population. Another director made the comment that they have “a ton of faculty training and staff development” opportunities related to diversity. Other directors mentioned professional development experiences that included hiring an outside consultant, participating in in-house workshops, attending conferences outside of the school e.g. People of Color Conference and NAIS Diversity Leadership Institute, creating affinity groups for teachers, and organizing diversity speakers. Each of these experiences provides knowledge and awareness that equip teachers and other educators to meet the needs of Black students and their parents.

One director stated that she needed more adequate training to be able to fulfill the responsibilities of her role as Cultural Diversity Director. Although the other individuals that were interviewed appeared well-equipped to support the Black students and parents in their schools, the researcher thinks that there are likely others who feel as this director communicated. From the data collected through this research, it appears that professional development is an important learning experience that can directly and indirectly support Black students and their parents.

Theme #3: Heightened Awareness

Of the 390 references taken from the transcriptions, 77 (19.7%) of them focused on the need for heightened awareness and opportunity for voices to be heard. The need for teachers, faculty, and other community members to be more aware of the experience Black students have

in independent schools was noted. Documentaries such as *Prep School Negro* (2012) and *The American Promise* (2013) support the comments made by those interviewed that Black students do have a unique experience in independent schools. Individuals also noted the importance of providing opportunity for Black students and parents to share their experiences. A director noted that they (Black students and parents) need to be given the opportunity to talk about concerns, questions, and issues they may have.

One director described a situation where a White mother's awareness was raised when her daughter ended up attending a Black affinity group meeting by mistake. At first, the mother was upset about the situation; however, after the director explained the function of the affinity group, the mother stated, "This must be how these students feel every day." Through the experience described by the director, the mother's awareness of the Black experience on campus was heightened to such a degree that she donated \$10,000 to support a program to bring more teachers of color to the school.

One director echoed Arrington et al. (2003) when she stated that awareness was of most importance when supporting Black students and their parents. She commented that students and teachers needed to be aware of differences. It was important to her that people not try to hide differences but to acknowledge them. She specifically spoke about the idea that "not seeing color" was not a healthy way to view others. She stated that she wanted people to see her "blackness" and recognize the differences that she has and how those differences can contribute to the community. Another director spoke to the fact that people need to be "open enough to raise awareness." He stated that is not easy to be transparent and open about sensitive topics, but in the end, it benefits the kids.

Guiding parents to be more aware of their own feelings and thoughts is one topic that a director mentioned. He stated that “we (as parents) bring our past to their present,” and that can cause problems that the students were not aware of. He discussed specifically how he has helped parents at his school understand their past experiences and expectations. He has helped parents not transfer thoughts and feelings to their children. He shared his own biases that he had to lay down when he started his job; he was the only Black teacher in the high school.

Awareness of the Black experience comes from hearing from Black students. Providing opportunities for students to be heard is important to all the directors. Honest and transparent conversations allow students to feel valued, to feel heard, and to feel their experience is important. When given the opportunity to share, they will. One director communicated that students will say to her, “We just want space and time to talk.” Another director commented that, “A lot of kids just want their voice to be heard.” According to one director, his job is to ensure every student on campus has a voice.

As directors and other school leaders look for avenues for students to share their stories, some schools have developed affinity groups. Affinity groups offer students a safe place to discuss hurtful moments or process experiences that would be difficult to do in other settings (Parsons & Ridley, 2012). Other schools provide club experiences that allow student voices to be heard by the greater school community. One director shared that White allies at her school are also a resource that she tapped into as an avenue for Black voices to be heard and for awareness to heighten among the majority. She commented that there are students and faculty who are seen as White allies within the school community because these people have expressed an interest in understanding the experience Black students have in her school and have demonstrated a desire in fostering a inclusive environment for all students.

Through the research, another voice was also heard. At one school, some students voiced a concern about affinity groups because they wanted their school to be united not divided.

Parents also voiced the same concern. The director who addressed the concerns explained to the students and to the parents that the goal of the affinity groups was not to be divisive; rather, the groups were to provide an opportunity for support. Situations arise, even in the most progressive schools, where students need to be able to process an experience in a safe place. Affinity groups provide this space (Parsons & Ridley, 2012).

Theme #4: Administrative Structures

Of the 390 references extracted from the transcriptions, 66 (16.9%) of them were related to school structures that offer support for Black students and their parents. The nodes that were collapsed under the theme of school structures included faculty representation, school mission and vision, financial support for parents, budgets, racial composition, and other school structures. Each of these areas offers either direct or indirect support for Black students or their parents. School leaders have created different structures to meet the needs of these students and parents within their schools.

One school has a Cultural Diversity Director who coordinates the work of a Diversity Team. The team consist of two coordinators, one in the lower school level and one in the middle school level. The Director is in the upper school. Each school level also has a Diversity Team that works with the coordinators and the director to plan and execute diversity initiatives and activities. One other school had a similar structure where there were coordinators at each level. Although, most schools had only one person designated by name as director. One school did not have a designated person. The philosophy of that particular school was that diversity was

everyone's job. It was clearly stated through the school's mission and communication material that diversity was central to the school's work.

Cultural Diversity Directors spoke of developing strategic plans to meet the needs of Black students, creating a department of multicultural programs and services, looking at the system in place to support Black students, undergoing a school audit to determine if the most effective approaches are in place, and identifying who can most influence the system. Many statements were made that illustrated that diversity is a priority at these schools: "the fabric of the school," "there is a genuine interest," "it is part of the legacy, what I am trying to do here as a leader," "intentional purpose to change the dynamics of the environment," "they (school leaders) wanted to put (Black) individuals in positions of influence," "diversity is our mission," "everybody's gifts are valued at school," and "we want kids who will change the landscape of our school." Individuals spoke of the importance of developing intentional structures to support Black students and their parents. They also spoke of the commitment that leads to progress. The above statements made during four interviews speak to the mission and vision that has been created within these four schools.

Five of the participants referred to top-down approach for gaining support for Black students and their parents within the community. This approach was also found in the literature. For a school community to embrace diversity, one of the first steps, according to Pitts (2009), former president of the University of Indianapolis, is for the "president to set a tone of honesty about diversity" (p. 16). They spoke about the commitment of Heads of School and other key decision-making leaders within the school. Two participants commented on the bold, courageous commitment current or past Heads have made to diversify their school community, particularly

in regards to providing support for Black students and their parents. One director focused on the Head of School's commitment financially to support the Multicultural Program at her school.

One person spoke of the lack of commitment and awareness at her school. She is at the beginning stages of developing a cultural diversity program that will better meet the needs of Black students on her campus. She recognized the need and experienced the frustration when structures were not in place to support the needs of particular students.

Faculty representation of Black teachers and administrators was a topic that was discussed in all interviews. During each interview, participants were asked how they would like to see the support for Black students and their parents to be different at their school. All participants commented they would like to see additional Black teachers and administrators. One participant stated that it would offer "huge" support for students and parents to have a higher number of Black faculty on campus. Two individuals also spoke of the need for Black representation on the Board of the School. Establishing diversity at the Board level is a successful tool, according to one individual, for supporting Black students within the school community. During one interview, it was stated that "it's okay to have diversity" as an identified need during employment selection. "So you can put us in the cafeteria, you can put us cleaning up the campus, but you can't put us in front of your kids," was one comment an individual made when discussing faculty representation. Although the need for more Black teachers was recognized, it was also stated that finding Black teachers who want to work in independent schools is difficult.

Directors addressed the need for having a Cultural Diversity Director and the impact not having one can have on a community. According to one participant, "Not having support systems and having a ton of kids can be devastating and really spoil the community." Schools need to

have someone to support the students. Schools that do not have coordinators are not able to offer support to students. “The biggest thing schools can do, in my mind, is not with the students directly, it’s with the faculty because if they (the students) see themselves and they find support networks by looking around, they will be doing better, trust me, in schools.”

Theme #5: Community Involvement

Upon analysis of the node report, the researcher observed that 24 (6.2%) of the references were related to the support of Black students provided through community involvement. Community involvement encompassed community support for diversity, celebration of Black events, and attendance at Black conferences.

Participants discussed the importance of the school community at large strategically supporting Black students. One director clearly stated that support for Black students is not just for Black students, “It’s for everybody.” His comments support the fact that studies show that diversity benefits all students (Phillips, 2014). Another director stated that the quality of education rises for all students when Black students and Black teachers are a part of the school community. Another director stated that she recognized that “if we don’t bring more diversity to this school, then our students won’t be prepared in life.” In addition to those comments, one director stated that he has found that more majority families are interested in a more diverse school environment for their children for the same reasons stated by these directors.

Support for Black students and their parents within an independent school community can be seen through the following learning experiences: International Day Celebrations, assemblies focused on Black history, Black parent dinners and forums, conferences and

workshops that focus on Black experiences, and board committees that focus on diversity, equity, and justice.

Suggestions for Learning Experiences

Suggestions for support for Black students and their parents were made all 10 participants. The suggestions and the support that each learning experience would provide are outlined in Table 3. The table summarizes the learning experiences that were discussed during the interviews. The learning experiences may also be categorized under one the five themes listed above.

Table 3

Summary of Suggestions from Participants

Suggestions	Rationale
Summer Bridge Program	Social and academic support prior to the start of school, introduction of faculty and staff, tour of the campus
Guide parents on how advocate for their children	Parents can be afraid to advocate for their children in the way white parents often do
Allow opportunities for students to incorporate pop-culture into learning activities	Students will be more engaged if they can relate to the activity
Intentionally place Black people in teaching and administrative roles	Good for all students to see Black people in these roles, good for Black students to “see themselves” in these roles
Partner with Black churches	Build relationships with those in the community that are closest to the Black community
Train teachers and students to be more culturally aware	People need to be taught to be aware, many racial divides are created out of ignorance
Create affinity groups	Provide a safe place for sensitive conversations

Table 3 Continued

Summary of Suggestions from Participants

Suggestions	Rationale
Make diversity fun e.g. Disney Club to explore diversity	Connect with the students, allow them to enjoy each other and find common ground
Partner with outside agencies to attract Black students e.g. A Better Chance	Black families are often introduced to independent schools through community programs
Offer a fee waiver for entrance fees and entrance tests	Barriers have to be taken away for families to explore the option of independent school
Offer the same percentage of financial assistance for other financial obligations throughout the year	Tuition is not the only cost of an independent school experience: textbooks, trips, fees
Establish a book loan program	Purchasing books is expensive
Ask the uniform store to provide a \$100 gift card for families who receive financial assistance	Provides a way to further support the family, allows community involvement
Attend the People of Color Conference	Provides a great experience for students and staff, students come back and share
Visit historically Black colleges and universities to look for potential employment candidates	Do not wait on them to come to you, you need to go to them
Be intentional about acknowledging Black events	Educate the community
Ask the question – the students will tell you what they need	Starting the conversation shows that you care and that you are being proactive not reactionary
Hire a white consultant	Sometimes the message is received better from a White person rather than a Black person when speaking to a majority White staff
Affirm the students	Assimilating into a new environment can take some time, students may need affirmation and encouragement

Review of Print Collateral

As part of this research, the websites of all 10 schools were reviewed to determine if Black students and their parents were represented through the communications of the schools. Print material for three of the schools was also reviewed. Table 4 provides a summary of the analysis of these documents. Each school represented Black students through the communication material. Seven of the 10 schools specifically addressed a commitment to diversity through the school's mission statement or through a diversity statement. Diversity plans were on two school websites. One school had a link to videos that highlighted the students who discussed different diversity programs at the school. Links to additional diversity information was provided on three of the schools' websites. Six of the websites highlighted specific diversity events held at the schools.

Development and admission print collateral and electronic documents were also reviewed. Magazines or information packets from six schools were reviewed. All six had pictures that represented Black students. One school had a Diversity Programs Brochure that outline the school's diversity plan and programs in place to support diverse students. One school had a feature story on a Black student in the school's magazine. Another school featured a local Black politician who had attended a school event. Representation in such communications sends a message of commitment to diversity to current and future families. One interview participant commented that it was important that current and future Black families see Black students represented in school communications. According to the participant, such representation speaks to the level of commitment a school has to diversity.

Table 4

Record of Print Collateral

School	Number of Students	Racial Composition	Diversity within Mission Statement Other references to Diversity	Artifacts Reviewed
#1	1800 students	32% Students of Color 15% Black or African American	-Black student featured in the school magazine	Website, School Magazine Fall 2014 edition
#2	1330 students	11 % Diversity 8 % Black or African American	-School's missions statement "embraces differences inherent in a diverse community" -How diverse is the student body FAQ -Local black politician featured in school magazine -Program for Global Citizenship -Multiple Clubs highlighted with a diversity focus	Website, School Magazine Fall 2014 edition
#3	350 students	23 % International 15% Black or African American	-International Day -Statistics	Website, View Book, Development Magazine Fall 2014 edition
# 4	1200 students	9% Black or African American	-International Fair -Statistics	Website, Development Magazine 2014 edition
#5	1129 students	unknown	-Mission statement references diversity -Many diverse student pictures	Website, Strategic Plan 2013, School Magazine Fall 2014
#6	1850	30% Diverse 11% Black or African American	-Link for Community on website that leads to Diversity & Inclusion Inclusion Programs Affinity & Community Meet the Team -Videos that focused on diversity work within the community -Outline of diversity plan and programs -Diversity events for each school level	Website

#7	191 students	38% Black or African American	Mission to provide a diverse environment -Diversity link under About Us -27 page Diversity Plan Document -Description of Diversity, Equity, and Justice Committee	Website, Admissions Packet, Diversity Plan
#8	1700 students	21% Students of Color 13% Black or African American	-Diversity & Multicultural Programs link -Diversity Mission Statement -Outline of Diversity Department and Programs -A link to an outside organization that supports minority students enter independent schools	Website, Diversity Programs Brochure, Link to outside organization
#9	990 students	28% Diverse 13% Black	-Multicultural Program link -Professional Development mentioned diversity -Multiple Diversity Committees within the school	Website
#10	1500 students	24% Diverse 9% Black or African American	-Diversity link under About -Outline of Diversity Department and Programs	Website

Summary

The findings of the research identified learning experiences that provide support for Black students and their parents within independent schools. The common themes identified were targeted support, academic structures, heightened awareness, administrative structures, and community involvement. The avenue for the most support discovered through this research is the area of targeted support or the role the Cultural Diversity Directors play in providing support for these students and their parents. It is not surprising to the researcher that the need for a full-time Cultural Diversity Director was mentioned 12 times during the interviews. Along with the role of

Cultural Diversity Directors, other learning experiences were identified to provide support for Black students and their parents. Affinity groups were mentioned 38 times during the interviews. White allies were mentioned seven times as effective sources of support. The other learning experience that was mentioned five times was the participation in conferences outside of school. The People of Color Conference and the Diversity Leadership Institute are both conferences that were referred to during interviews.

Directors are seeking ways to support Black students and parents in their schools. They are asking the tough questions like, “Why do all the Black kids sit together at lunch?” They are seeking knowledge and information as to what the Black experience is like in independent schools. One director asked alumni, “What are the things that you would like to have known prior to coming to the school?”

The findings from this research show that school leaders are finding ways to support Black students and their parents. It is the hope of the researcher that independent educators can use the findings of this researcher to implement support for Black students and their parents within other schools as well.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Data collected from the eight Cultural Diversity Directors and two school leaders indicated that Black students have a unique experience within the context of an independent school community. All participants agreed that Black students have needs that are different from other students at their schools. The needs can be social, emotional, relational, financial, or academic. Data collected through interviews provided insight as to how each school attempts to meet the needs of this group of students and their parents. Those interviewed shared specific information about the learning experiences and intentional efforts that were in place to support Black students and parents within their communities. The remainder of this chapter will be a discussion of the findings of the research. Implications of the research on future practice within independent schools will also be discussed.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question and Answers

The overriding question the research sought to answer was: What learning experiences are in place in independent schools in a large, southern metropolitan area to support Black students and their parents? The following questions were considered in order to explore adequately the stated research question:

1. How aware are independent school leaders of specific needs of Black students and parents that may arise as a result of attending a predominately White school?

Individuals who were interviewed stated clearly the needs of Black students within their respective school communities. During each interview, social, emotional, academic, and financial needs of students and parents were discussed. It was apparent that each of these individuals had an awareness of student needs; however, each of them also spoke to the fact that it cannot be assumed that others in the school share the same awareness. Many of them did state that key persons in leadership at their schools recognize the needs of Black students and their parents; however, one did express frustration that those who make decisions for the school community do not necessarily have the same acknowledgement or recognition. Awareness was the most discussed topic identified through the data analysis process. During the interviews, comments about awareness were mentioned 38 times. Almost 10% of the comments made by the participants were associated with the importance of awareness. Awareness is necessary for schools to determine best how to meet the needs of Black students (Arrington et al., 2003). Data revealed that directors and school leaders were aware of the needs of Black students and their parents within the independent school communities represented in this research.

2. What learning experiences have independent schools put in place specifically to support the needs of Black students and their parents?

The list of learning experiences is extensive and are outlined below. Each interview revealed learning experiences that are in place at each school. Many of the experiences were similar; however, some were unique to particular schools. The data did reveal that schools have intentionally developed or created specific learning experiences to support the identified needs of Black students and their parents.

Learning Experiences in Independent Schools to Support Black Students and their Parents

Theme #1: Targeted Support

Student Support

Affinity Groups

Liaison

Advocate

Relationship Development

Workshops

Guest Speakers

Celebrations

Conferences

Mentoring Programs

Parent Support

Dinners

Forums

Celebrations

Theme #2: Academic Structures

Bridge Programs

Academic support

Curriculum support

Identify achievement gaps

Intentional scheduling of students

Professional Development

Conferences

Workshops

Consultants

Theme #3: Heightened Awareness

Affinity groups

White allies

Teens Against Prejudice

Guidance lessons

Guest Speakers

Theme #4: Administrative Structures

Black representation in teaching staff, administration, and board composition

Mission

Scheduling practices

Budget to support programs

Strategic plans for diversity

Theme #5: Community Involvement

Partnership with Black churches

Partnerships with agencies that connect Black students with independent schools

Celebration events

Conferences

3. How do schools assess the learning experiences in place to support Black students and their parents?

Data did not reveal any particular assessments that schools had in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning experiences designed to support this subgroup of the population within the schools. When asked the question, each participant stated that the area of formal data collection and assessment was an area for improvement. Six individuals did state that they are in the process of developing structures to assess the impact the learning experiences have on the students, the parents, and the boarder community. Informal feedback from students, parents, and teachers was mentioned during multiple interviews. Participants reflected upon personal experiences that had been shared with them from parents or students to indicate that the learning experiences had provided needed support. During the second interview, it was shared that a

White mother had called concerned about a meeting that was held with Black students. Her daughter was offended that she had not been invited to the meeting, and only by chance had she ended up in the room where the meeting was held. After a clear explanation was given as to the purpose of the meeting, the mother provided a \$10,000 donation to help support the efforts of the diversity work at the school. Although a formal assessment of that meeting did not take place, an informal conversation with a parent about the importance of such a meeting did result in the parent understanding the value and the impact it had on the school community. The collection of such experiences can be one tool of assessment.

4. Which learning experiences do school leaders find to be the most effective when supporting Black students and their parents?

Responses to this question varied. Three of the participants commented on the value of curriculum and courses taught in their schools. Other participants referenced the importance of awareness among school community members. Professional development for teachers was also referenced twice as a response. Table 5 provides a summary of all responses from participants identified only by the school code that was assigned to them at the onset of the study to ensure confidentiality of all participants.

Table 5:
Responses to interview question #7

School Code	Which programs, initiatives, or policies do you find to be the most effective with Black students and their parents?
#1	Providing financial support for families that need it
#2	Providing students the opportunity to be heard, checking grades, and working with outside agencies to attract families to our school – A Better Chance
#3	Providing opportunities for the school community to be more aware of differences and experiences
#4	Examining the systems in place to support Black students and knowledge of resources
#5	Providing lessons in the classroom to address appropriate behaviors and attitudes with the counselor
#6	Having Black teachers and administrators, providing transportation, having a diversity team, advocating for students, changing facial hair policy
#7	Providing teacher training and opportunities for students and teachers to become more self-aware
#8	Developing a mentoring program, providing professional development, and creating affinity groups
#9	Implementing curriculum that supports equity and justice
#10	Developing curriculum that supports diversity

5. How have school administrators facilitated a culture where Black students and parents feel welcomed and valued as part of the school community?

Those interviewed discussed developing relationships with parents, providing safe places for voices to be heard, and having dinners and forums specifically for Black parents. Each participant emphasized the importance of developing relationships with parents. One participant shared a story about meeting with a family to answer financial concerns. He stated that if he had not developed a strong relationship with the family prior to their concerns arising it would have been likely that they would not have approached him with their concerns.

Limitations of Findings

Limitations of the findings are a direct reflection of the limitation of the design of the study. Data was only collected from independent schools in one region of the country, the southeast. The population and culture of schools from various areas around the country may find that different learning experiences benefit Black students. The experiences that Black students have in schools across the country may also be different than the experiences of Black students in schools located in the metropolitan area where this research took place.

Interviews were only conducted with eight Cultural Diversity Directors, one Head of School, and one principal representing 10 schools. Therefore, the data collected is largely from a one-sided perspective. Data, other than the review of print collateral, was solely based upon the individual's comments and responses to interview questions which could be argued were based upon the person's personal perspectives, experiences, and biases. Data gathered directly from students would provide greater insight into the learning experiences that have the most impact and value to students. It is likely that teachers and other educators such as counselors would also provide valuable data as how best to support the needs of Black students.

The number of interviews is a limit of this study. A larger sample size would allow the findings of the data to be more broadly transferred to other school settings. The particular group from which the researcher sought participation also limits the findings. Those interviewed were members of a Diversity Practitioners support group within an independent school association in the metropolitan area where the research took place. It was a known fact that each school had made a commitment, at some level, to support the Black students and parents within their communities. The researcher cannot assume that all independent schools have an equal interest in supporting this subgroup of their population.

The research focused only on Black students. Therefore, the findings are limited to this one subgroup within independent schools. It cannot be assumed that the same learning experiences would meet the needs of other minority groups within independent schools. There are obviously other subgroups that could be a focus of research.

All but one person interviewed worked with either middle school or high school students. The data collected limits the use of the data for lower school students. Although some of the learning experiences would benefit students at all levels, the data may not be transferable to younger students.

Researcher Comments

Thoughts from the researcher's journal:

- Upon completion of each interview, it became evident that each person had a story as to why he or she had chosen to serve his or her school in the capacity of a Cultural Diversity Director or a school leader. Each person had experiences that influenced and impacted his or her professional work. Some felt the need to begin with that story as a way to introduce themselves.
- Awareness is key. Over and over again participants emphasized the need for the dominant culture to become aware of the needs of Black students. Just ask, the students will tell you what they need. Do not be afraid to have the hard conversations. The students will provide you with insight and knowledge that you cannot gain from any other source.
- Relationships with students, parents, and teachers drive the work of these directors and leaders.

- The researcher wondered if they questioned the motives of a White person conducting this type of research. At the beginning of some interviews, it appeared that there was some caution as to how the interview would go; however, after a few minutes participants seemed comfortable and appeared to be transparent with their responses.
- White allies are seen as a huge asset to students and Cultural Diversity Directors at two of the schools. The researcher had not considered this position until the onset of this research. At that time, the recognition of such support became evident and the value of White allies was recognized.
- The researcher appreciated the added bonus of network opportunities, and future collaboration and support. Follow-up emails and sharing of articles and resources occurred as a result of the three of the interviews. Information about books, workshops, conferences, and consultants was shared with the researcher.
- Educators cannot make assumptions across the board. Every school is somewhat different. Cultures and climates are different. Leadership support is different. School leaders have to determine the needs of their school community and determine the best plan of action. It is wise to have a plan A, a plan B, and a plan C. The first plan may not work and that is acceptable.

Conducting interviews was an effective approach to collect data to answer the research question. Interviews provided the opportunity for further discussion about the predetermined questions. A survey would not have provided the depth of data that was collected through the interviews. The face-to-face interviews allowed a better connection between researcher and those who were interviewed than did the phone interviews. The phone interviews were beneficial in

that interviews that could not take place face to face were able to take place. However, during each phone interview there was some level distraction that had to be acknowledged.

NVivo proved to be an efficient tool for transcriptions and data analysis. Although a time consuming process, NVivo was an organizational tool that made the process manageable. Data was easy to manipulate and organize. Data could be moved from one node to another easily at varying stages of the analysis process. As the researcher reevaluated the categorization of data, it was easy to change nodes when needed. A frustration came when the researcher attempted to isolate particular word phrases. NVivo would not do an exact word match of word phrases; therefore, making it difficult to located certain phrases in the 139 pages of transcriptions.

As reflected upon in a previous paragraph, the researcher has benefited from this research experience. However, an unexpected benefit of the research was that six of the individuals interviewed also expressed appreciation for the time to reflect upon their craft. One director stated that the time spent during the interview provided her the opportunity to “clarify my (her) own thoughts about our (her) school and our (her) students.”

Relationship of Findings to Previous Literature

Although little research has been conducted to explore the support Black students and parents receive in independent schools, studies and literature have explored different facets of a Black student’s experience within independent schools. Topics of studies and literature include: the experience Black students have when attending independent schools, the importance of Black faculty in independents schools, the impact diverse populations has on all students, and the desire of independent schools to want to attract Black students and other minorities. All of these ideas

were also supported in this study. During the interviews, each of these topics was discussed to some degree. The comments and reflections of the participants are also seen in the literature.

The data collected through this research suggested that Black students who attend predominately White independent schools have an experience different from their White peers. Documentary films like *The Prep School Negro* (2012) and *The American Promise* (2013) are films that suggest the same. The purpose for these films was to encourage dialogue about the experiences Black students have in traditionally White independent school (Grossberg, 2014). The same was true for this research. As school leaders engaged in conversation about learning experiences for Black students, they were given the opportunity to reflect upon the experience Black students have as members of an independent school community.

One of the learning experiences identified through this research was the experience provided for students when there are Black teachers and administrators in independent schools. Several of the participants stated that Black faculty offer significant support to both Black students and their parents. However, it was noted that there is an underrepresentation of Black educators in most independent schools. Brosnan (2001) agreed with this reflection and stated that many independent schools do not have a good track record of hiring Black educators. In past five years, NAIS schools have seen a 10% increase in the number of diverse students; however, the same percentage of increase has not occurred for teachers or administrators. In fact, the number of diverse teachers has increased 5% and the number of diverse administrators has increased only 1% over the same time period (Mitchell, 2014). One participant made the comment that while the number of Black students in his school had increased the number of Black teachers and administrators had not. His comment is consistent with the NAIS statistics. This particular

director continued to say that if a school brings in Black students and does not provide the needed support there will be problems.

Although it was clearly stated through this research and a review of the literature that Black faculty are seen as an important source of support for Black students, participants stated that their schools often have difficulties finding Black educators who want to work in independent school. There are different factors that may contribute to that dilemma. Historically, salaries in independent schools are less competitive than those in public schools and this can result in Black educators not accepting jobs within independent schools. One of the participants referenced a strong teacher that worked at his school but left for a higher salary in a public school. One of the advantages for some independent schools when attracting Black teachers is that not all independent schools require state certification for teachers. The lack of this requirement opens the door for some people to enter a teaching career without a teaching degree or certificate. This can be seen as an advantage in the recruiting process when attracting Black educators to independent schools because they are not forced to return to college for an additional degree as they would be in a public school.

As stated in the review of research, school leaders are wise to recognize that developing a multicultural school coincides with efforts to hire teachers of color (Brosnan, 2001). Again, it is important that the conversation regarding diversity match the actions of the institution. Schools cannot state that diversity is a focus without backing up the statement with tangible actions that support a more diverse community. Hiring teachers of color is a tangible way to show a school community that there is a focus to foster a more diverse school community.

Romney (2008) found that many independent schools have established a serious commitment to diversity in recent years. This commitment was seen in the schools represented

through this study. Each director communicated that it was a priority of leaders of the school to focus on diversity and meet the needs of Black students, as well as other subgroups. Independent school leaders across the country seek ways in which to best support students who represent minority populations within independent schools (Arrington et al., 2003). This research revealed that not only do independent schools seek ways they are implementing ways to support Black students and their parents.

A benefit of supporting Black students and their parents is that they feel valued and supported by the school and are likely to remain at the school. When Black students choose to invest in an independent school community they contribute to a greater goal of providing a diverse environment that benefits all members. Participants referenced the benefit for all students to learn in a diverse environment where different perspectives are shared. It was stated that students need to learn how to respect and work with those that are different from themselves. The review of literature supports the same philosophy. Understanding human differences and appreciating the value each person brings to a particular setting is a necessity in a global society (Marsella, 2009).

Implications for Future Practice in Local Context

As independent school educators become more aware of the experiences Black students have within the school community, they will be able to provide a higher level of support for these students. Black students and parents have a more positive experience within independent school communities when educators learn how to provide learning experiences that will support the needs of these students. When Black students feel supported and valued as part of an independent school community they are more likely to remain and encourage other Black students to attend. Therefore, an implication of this study is that independent educators will be

better equipped to attract, support, and retain Black students because of the learning experiences and support structures that can be implemented upon reflection and review of this research. An additional implication of the research is that independent schools will serve a more diverse student population and in turn create a learning environment that will prepare students to enter a diverse university and eventually a diverse workforce.

Educators would be wise to consider the impact the following learning experiences could have, either directly or indirectly, on Black students and their parents: providing the opportunity for student and parent voices to be heard, attending conferences to promote heightened awareness within faculty and students, hiring more Black educators for both teaching positions and administrative positions, and providing professional development experiences that heighten teachers' awareness of Black students' needs. In addition to these learning experiences, other structural changes within schools could provide needed support for Black students and their parents. One such change, could be the addition or expansion the Cultural Diversity Director's position to a full-time position.

All educators need to develop and expand networking circles. Support for Black students cannot be done alone. The researcher would encourage Cultural Diversity Directors to find or create a group of Diversity practitioners to collaborate and plan with on a regular basis. The support one receives from such a group will provide a greater level of support for students. Each individual interviewed mentioned other practitioners in the field or other school programs that had influenced their practice within their schools.

Implications for Future Research

Supporting Black students and their families has a direct impact on an independent school's community. The learning experiences discovered through this research are only one aspect of the overall support needed for this group of students and their parents. Additional research is needed in other areas to determine how best to serve Black students and their parents within independent schools.

Although a number of learning experiences were described within this research, the effectiveness of those learning experiences was not investigated. Assessment of learning experiences is an area where research is needed. A research study to determine which learning experiences are most effective would be valuable for independent school educators. Resources and time are limited in most independent schools. Research to assess the effectiveness and value of learning experiences that support Black students and their parents would assist school leaders when determining where to spend resources and time.

This research was limited to the perceptions and experiences of eight Cultural Diversity Directors and two other school leaders. Conducting research to determine the perceptions and experiences of Black students, Black parents, and independent school teachers related to support for Black students and parents would provide valuable information. An opportunity for students and parents to describe the learning experiences that they feel provide support within an independent school would provide valuable insight for school leaders. Research that specifically provided an opportunity for Black students and parents to identify their needs as members of an independent school would also allow school leaders the ability better to address the needs of this subgroup of a school population. Teachers could identify specific learning experiences that provide support for Black students within their classrooms and have an impact on academic achievement.

Although Black students were identified as the focus of this research, there are other subgroups represented within independent schools that also do not fit the typical profile of the traditional independent school student. A duplicate research study could be conducted with a focus on any minority group represented in independent schools. A study to specifically identify learning experiences that would be supportive for White students in a predominately Black school community would provide insight for educators who work within such an environment.

Affinity Groups and White Allies were two sources of support identified through this research. Research to determine the impact that these two sources of support have on Black students who attend independent schools could be conducted to provide independent school leaders with additional knowledge as how best to serve Black students. Understanding the impact that these two sources of support have on the community at large would also provide school leaders with valuable information as how best to create and foster an environment of respect for others.

One identified need that was discussed in all interviews is the need for funding to support some Black students who desire to attend independent schools. Financial support varies greatly from school to school. Research to identify different sources of funding through grants and organizations would benefit all independent schools. Another avenue used to support Black parents as they investigate educational options are community agencies that work to educate families about independent schools and connect them to schools that would be a good fit for their child. Several participants shared that their schools partner with community agencies to bring Black students to their schools. Research to determine the effectiveness of such partnerships would allow school leaders an avenue to explore this option when considering strategies to attract Black students to their schools.

Black teachers and administrators are underrepresented in public education but even more so within independent schools. During every interview, the concern over the lack of Black teachers and administrators was mentioned. Research to explore faculty racial composition within independent schools and the impact it has on a students' school experiences would provide beneficial information for school leaders as they seek to find the best candidates for positions within their schools. One comment made by several individuals was that many Black educators do not consider independent schools as places of employment simply because they are not aware of opportunities or they do not think they will be welcomed in such communities. Research as how best to attract Black educators to independent schools would also add to the field of literature for independent schools.

Micro-aggression is a term that refers to offensive social interactions between people of different cultures or backgrounds (Torres, Andrade, & Diaz, 2012). Future research to examine the effects micro-aggressions have on student experiences and relationships within independent schools would be beneficial. As independent school leaders become more aware of the experience Black students have in their schools, it is likely that behaviors like micro-aggressions would be brought to the attention of school leaders. If school leaders are not aware that certain behaviors occur, they are not able to address them. Research on this topic would be another avenue to heighten the awareness of the experience Black students have in independent schools.

Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to identify learning experiences that support Black students and their parents in independent school. Each interview provided a wealth of information about learning experiences in place to meet the needs of this subgroup of the schools' population. The knowledge and insight that was shared was beneficial for the purposes

of this research and the researcher's professional responsibilities. Personally, the researcher was encouraged to hear of all the work that is done to support Black students within these independent schools.

The data collected through this research suggested that the interview participants recognized and acknowledged the need for identified learning experiences to be in place to support Black students and their parents within their school communities. A clear mission and vision for each school was articulated through each interview and support for such was apparent through print collateral and electronic communications from the school. Evidence of schools' philosophy of diversity and support for Black students and their parents was clearly communicated by each participant. Each school leader should be commended on the intentionality in which they approach their responsibilities as the Cultural Diversity Director for their school. Although there are no perfect programs, each of those represented through this research appear to make a difference in the lives of the students, parents, and teachers in their schools.

Although much work has been done within independent schools to meet the needs of Black students and their parents, independent schools must maintain committed dedication to equity and justice if they are to consider themselves members of such a society that values the same (Brosnan, 2001). School leaders should be mindful and aware of the experiences Black students have as members of an independent school community and be intentional about meeting the academic, social, emotional, and financial needs these students may have. Students should have an advocate who is ready to listen and provide a safe place for support when needed.

Although the purpose of this research was to identify learning experiences that support Black students and their parents, independent educators are encouraged to commit to

understanding and knowing the experiences of Black students. Educators cannot meet needs that they do not know exist. Participants often stated that educators cannot make the assumption that the experience of one Black student will be the same for all Black students. Intimate knowledge of the experience a Black student and their parent has within in an independent school will allow educators to develop and implement learning experiences to support their needs. Independent school leaders cannot lose sight of the value of support for Black parents in their communities. Each participant spoke to the importance of Black parents and the need to be included in the school community.

As the awareness of the experiences of Black students is heightened within an independent school community, a natural progression is to identify specific needs of these students and put in place learning experiences that will meet these needs. As the needs of Black students and their parents are met within an independent school community, it is hoped that this subgroup of the population will feel valued and welcomed as members of the school community. The result will hopefully be that the Black students will remain a part of the independent school community and encourage others to join them. The desired end result is that independent schools will learn how to attract, support, and retain Black students and their parents. The same is true for Black teachers and faculty.

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APPENDIX
AUDIT TRAIL: INTERVIEWEE STATISTICS

Assigned Code	Interview #	Contact Person Male or Female Race	Position	School Level	Interview Time and Structure	Number of pages for transcription
School #1	#1	Male Black	Dean of Students & Cultural Diversity Director	High School	32:02 minutes Face-to-face	11
School #2	#2	Male Black	Admissions Officer & Cultural Diversity Director	All levels	149:29 minutes Face-to-Face	49
School #3	#4	Female Black	Teacher & Cultural Diversity Director	High School	33:49 minutes phone interview due to weather	9
School #4	#8	Female Black	Counselor & Cultural Diversity Director	High School	25:14 minutes Face-to-face	7
School #5	#9	Female White	Principal	Lower School	24:17 minutes Face-to-face	7
School #6	#3	Female Black	Cultural Diversity Director	All levels	55:59 minutes Face-to-face	16
School #7	#5	Male White	Head of School	All levels	58:02 minutes Face-to-face	13
School #8	#6	Male Black	Admissions Officer & Cultural Diversity Director	All levels	45:48 minutes Phone due to weather	10
School #9	#10	Male Black	Teacher & Cultural Diversity Director	Middle School	29:36 minutes Phone due to participant's schedule	8
School #10	#7	Female White	Cultural Diversity Director		27:57 minutes Phone due to weather	9